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Alex Palou races Legion car to INDYCAR title

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Veterans Day 2023

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VETERANS DAY

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American Legion Family members clean up Freedom Park in Charlotte, N.C., as a part of a service project. See more coverage of the 104th National Convention on **page 26**. Photo by Jennifer Blohm

ON THE COVER
Clemson University Air Force ROTC cadet Brittney McKeone of Aynor, S.C., places U.S. flags around the Scroll of Honor, Clemson's memorial to 497 alumni who made the ultimate sacrifice.
Photo by Ken Scar

View videos, read more stories and find resources at ***legion.org***.

The American Legion Magazine, a leader among national general-interest publications, is published monthly by The American Legion for its 1.6 million members. These wartime veterans, working through more than 12,000 community-level posts, dedicate themselves to God and Country and traditional American values; strong national security; adequate and compassionate care for veterans, their widows and orphans; community service; and the wholesome development of our nation's youth.

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How support from home saved a sailor

On Veterans Day, we honor all who served. We should also be grateful to the parents who raised these great Americans. If you ever wondered how much support from the homefront means to our troops, I refer you to a short piece written by Claire Barrett posted at HistoryNet on Aug. 2.

Barrett tells the remarkable story of Elgin Staples of Akron, Ohio, who was a 19-year-old Navy signalman stationed aboard USS *Astoria* in 1942. When his cruiser came under attack by the Japanese near Savo Island, Staples was severely wounded and thrown into the sea by concussive blasts.

After treading water for nearly four hours with the help of his M1926 inflatable rubber lifebelt, Staples was rescued by the destroyer USS *Bagley*. He quickly returned to *Astoria* in a futile effort to keep the damaged ship from sinking. Hours later, Staples was again in the water, kept afloat with the same lifebelt, until USS *President Jackson* picked him up the next day. More than 200 men died in the attack on *Astoria*, and the Battle of Savo Island resulted in 1,023 Allied deaths.

In 2001, Staples described his homecoming shortly after the battle. His mother told him she had been working at the local Firestone plant. Staples pulled out his lifebelt and showed her the stamp indicating that it was made at the plant where she worked. "Son, I'm an inspector at Firestone. This is my number," she whispered.

"We stared at each other, too stunned to speak," Staples later wrote. "Then I stood up, walked around the table and pulled her up from her chair. We held each other in a tight embrace, saying nothing. My mother was not a demonstrative woman, but the significance of this amazing coincidence overcame her usual reserve. We hugged each other for a long, long time, feeling the bond between us. My mother had put her arms halfway around the world to save me."

The remarkable coincidence shared by Vera Mueller-Staples and her son is comparable to winning a lottery, and for Vera the jackpot was rich indeed. Support from home has, and always will, make a difference.

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Veterans Strengthening America

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Mind Shift

Henry Howard's article on innovative PTSD therapy (September) was of great interest to me because of its success rate, low cost and quick intervention for sufferers. I had a dear friend of 50 years who was blown against a wall in the Pentagon on 9/11. She was head of the budget department and lost 23 of her 27 employees that day. Despite the terrific loss of human power and data for the year-end budget report due Sept. 30, she turned in the budget report on time. Yet I'm convinced she would have so benefited from RTM therapy, as that experience naturally took an almost unbearable toll on her inner peace and happiness. She died last February of Alzheimer's disease.

BettyAnn Haskell, Brewer, Maine

Photo by Ryan Ketterman

I am pleased to see all new modalities that make a dent in remediating the vestiges of war. This one looks good. Yet I respectfully submit a moderate *caveat emptor.* Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories appears to have great efficacy, yet it does not address what is now the in-vogue name "moral injury," nor the lingering spiritual component of PTSD. Neither are there any longitudinal studies to suggest that the 90% healing rate has a long half-life.

Michael Patrick Brewer, Crestline, Calif.

Devoted

Thank you for the article by Taylor Baldwin Kiland (September) on Vietnam POWs and MIAs. I have for more than 50 years worn a POW bracelet with the inscription "LCDR JAMES B. MILLS, 9-21-66," never having known what happened to him. I was shocked to learn, after all these years, that his remains were found and identified through DNA testing. I knew he was from Bakersfield, Calif., and flew off USS *Coral Sea* before becoming MIA, but not much more.

He has been in my daily thoughts, and I say a special prayer for him every Sept. 21. I retired from the naval service in 1992 as a command master chief petty officer.

K.D. Austin, Nederland, Texas

"What a way to start my journey as national commander. I will remember Larry Taylor for the rest of my life – not because I got to go to the White House, but because I got to know 1st Lt. Taylor personally as I traveled back to that heroic day in Vietnam when he put others before himself. He saved lives that day, and those he saved were changed forever."

National Commander Dan Seehafer, on attending **Chattanooga Post 14** member Larry Taylor's Medal of Honor ceremony Sept. 5. Read the story on **page 22**.

Photo by Mike Rohan

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I personally appreciate the work of the DPAA. In 1966, my college friend, Raul Guerra, signed up with the Navy and went to journalism school. He became a reporter for *Stars and Stripes* and was assigned to USS *Oriskany*, operating off Vietnam. On Oct. 8, 1967, looking for a story, he hopped a plane with four officers. Near Da Nang, the plane crashed high up on Monkey Mountain.

About 40 years later, a DPAA team talked with an older villager who had recovered the bones of five people from the mountain and buried them in his family graveyard. Four were identified, but there couldn't be a positive ID for the fifth because of a lack of DNA to use as a reference. Raul was born in Mexico and brought to the United States as an infant. His adoptive mother never told Raul he was adopted and would not allow a DNA sample. After she died, it was proven she wasn't his birth mother. It took 10 more years before DPAA was able to assure that the fifth body had to be Raul. Only because of the work of his childhood friend, Ruben Valencia, and DPAA did Petty Officer Raul Guerra come home. He was buried in Whittier, Calif., with full military honors.

Rodger Salkeld, Placentia, Calif.

Proud to render honors

While I was proud to see the blurb about the return of a World War II dog tag belonging to Army Air Force Sgt. Jackson McGill (FOB, September), no mention was made of the honor guard from Post 446 in Daleville, Ind., which performed three volleys and taps at that ceremony. Our detail commander, Gary Benefiel, volunteered our services. The son of the man who found the tag was there as well, and I was happy to welcome him to the United States using my college French. We were happy to have been part of this amazing experience.

Michael H. Evans, Anderson, Ind.

***THE AMERICAN LEGION MAGAZINE* WELCOMES YOUR OPINIONS**

Include your hometown and a daytime phone number for verification. All letters published are subject to editing. Due to the volume of mail received, not every letter can be acknowledged.

The American Legion Magazine,
P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206
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THE PLAYLIST

American Legion videos you don't want to miss.

Photo by Jeric Wilhelmsen

Florida ride remembers those who didn't come home
Florida American Legion Riders hit the road to honor, remember and respect POW/MIAs and their families.

The best medicine
Military-affiliated comedians "harness the power of laughter" on the Operation HEAL*ARIOUS tour stop at J.Q. Adams American Legion Post 233 in Killeen, Texas.

Visit **legion.org/magazine/videos** or subscribe to The American Legion's YouTube channel to see, show and share other American Legion videos.

72 U.S. Flag Code inquiries handled by the Legion's Americanism Division in August

1,467 American Legion posts that reported conducting Get Out the Vote programs during the 2022 membership year. Learn more about the initiative at **legion.org/vote**.

11.3 million
Facebook "reach" of a single iPhone video of the Legion Riders on the Legacy Run in August. An entire month's reach is generally around 2 million.

375,743
Members in the Sons of The American Legion on Aug. 10, an all-time high

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Taiwan is strategically located and is extremely important to the peace, prosperity and stability of the Indo-Pacific Region ...

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is consistently building its military capabilities and flexing its muscles in the East China Sea, South China Sea and most aggressively in the Taiwan Strait ...

The PRC is continuously blocking Taiwan's participation in international affairs ...

It is in the best interests of all parties on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to resolve political differences peacefully ...

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That the United States strongly advocate for the full membership of Taiwan in the United Nations, World Health Organization and other international organizations ...

That the United States should continue to take all necessary measures to boost Taiwan's self-defense capabilities to deter possible aggression by the PRC ...

That the United States should encourage both Taiwan and the PRC to promote peaceful dialogue and avoid any unilateral change of the status quo that might lead to military conflict.

Passed, American Legion National Convention, Aug. 29-31, 2023

Photo by Alyssa Schukar

Legion's National Security director receives Naval Order award

The Naval Order of the United States has named Mario Marquez, director of the American Legion National Security Division, its Distinguished Sea Service senior enlisted awardee for 2023.

A retired Marine Corps sergeant major, Marquez is a naturalized U.S. citizen through his 31 years of military service and is an advocate of the policy. He served as sergeant major of the III Marine Expeditionary Force, the largest overseas-positioned Marine Corps combat force.

The Naval Order of the United States is a fraternal organization, founded in 1890, that seeks to preserve U.S. naval and maritime history.

First-ever MCON celebrates military culture

Mix a comic con with the SHOT Show, add military culture and a festival-like atmosphere, and what do you get?

MCON, which debuts this month in Las Vegas. The American Legion is a founding partner of MCON, created by veterans to bring the military community together for an epic celebration. The first MCON will be held Nov. 10-12 at the Expo at World Market Center.

Marine Corps veteran and American Legion member Waco Hoover is among the founders of MCON. He oversees the strategy for the Be the One mission, which will have a prominent spot at the event. "This is the start of creating something that will be the pre-eminent event celebrating military culture each year," he says. "It's really exciting to merge the legacy of a 104-year-old organization with the promise of creating something to engage the younger generation of America's veterans."

For more information, visit **mcon.live** and **legion.org**.

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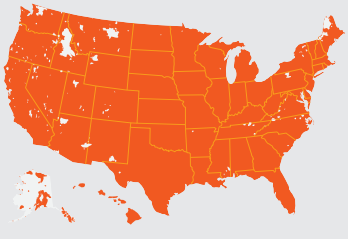

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Check out new monthly Be the One podcast

As part of its mission to reduce veteran suicide, The American Legion is launching a new monthly podcast series devoted to Be the One.

Amy Forsythe – an award-winning multimedia journalist, Marine Corps combat veteran and Navy reservist – is the series host. She interviews thought leaders, scientists, researchers and others about topics related to preventing veteran suicide, breakthrough therapies and more.

Amy Forsythe
Photo by Jennifer Blohm

"We'll be talking with myriad people, to give energy and momentum to a voice to help our folks at the local level," Forsythe says.

Who will be featured? "We are going to highlight our thought leaders, our scientists, our folks in the field and those advocating for our veterans. Hopefully it will be a resource for our listeners. And if it can help just one person – and if I can 'be the one' to help that one person – that's the most important thing."

What's your "why"? "I am proud to be a member of The American Legion and be part of an organization with the power to make change and create energy for making policies that affect veterans and their families."

EPISODES SO FAR

September: Marine Corps veteran Waco Hoover, who leads the Be the One strategy, discusses the mission's next phase. "We're doing an extensive amount of research and looking for suggestions from our community about who we should be aligned with."

October: Dr. Regan Stiegmann correlates lifestyle medicine to achieving mental wellness. "Mental health disorders like major depressive disorder and clinical symptoms of depression can often overlap with serious medical diagnoses like diabetes or cardiovascular disease … It's a really profound connection that is sometimes lost as we try to work with mental health issues."

November: Dr. Ruth Moore, a survivor of suicide, obtained her Ph.D. and now assists veterans and others in crisis. "We try to balance the chemistry without drugs … trying to instill healthy habits and things they can do like change their diets."

More than 200 Tango Alpha Lima podcast episodes are available at **legion.org/tangoalphalima**, the Legion's YouTube channel, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts and anywhere else you get your podcasts.

Bells of Peace program to recognize Hello Girls

This year's annual Bells of Peace Ceremony – held at 11 a.m. on the 11th day of the 11th month at the National World War I Memorial in Washington – will honor the contributions of the "Hello Girls," 217 bilingual women who served as Army Signal Corps switchboard operators. Bipartisan legislation in the Senate would award them the Congressional Gold Medal for their wartime service and 60-year fight to be recognized as veterans.

Army

The ceremony will be streamed live on on the Doughboy Foundation's YouTube channel at 10:45 a.m. Eastern.

Since 2018, thousands of local Bells of Peace ceremonies have kicked off Veterans Day. Access the event's web app at **2023.bellsofpeace.org**. Features include a countdown timer for synchronized bell tolling at 11 a.m. local time; bell tolling options, including single peals and 21 bells; a timer allowing for a moment of silence; and the sounding of taps.

Individuals and organizations are encouraged to register their events on the Bells of Peace website, and to share activities and observances through social media channels using the hashtags **#BellsOfPeace** and **#TollTheBells**.

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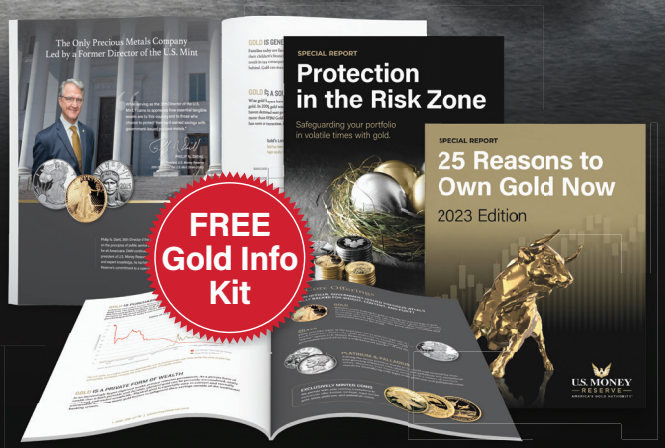
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1 Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Federal Reserve.
2 Source: "Historical Gold Prices - 1833 to Present," National Mining Association.

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SYFOVRE can cause serious side effects:

- Eye infection (endophthalmitis) or separation of layers of the retina (retinal detachment)

Please see additional Important Safety Information and Brief Summary on the following pages.

SYFOVRE is the first FDA–approved treatment proven to slow GA lesion growth

GA is an advanced form of AMD and can lead to irreversible vision loss that cannot be corrected with eyeglasses or surgery.

The symptoms of GA affect everyone differently but signs may include:

Straight lines that appear wavy

Difficulty seeing in low light

Missing or blurry spots in the center of your vision

Slowing lesion growth can delay the progression of GA. Talk to your eye doctor today to see if SYFOVRE may be right for you and visit KnowSYFOVRE.com to learn more.

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION (CONT'D)

SYFOVRE can cause serious side effects (cont'd):

- Call your healthcare provider right away if you have redness of the eye, eye pain, increased discomfort, worsening eye redness, blurred or decreased vision, an increased number of small specks floating in your vision, flashes of light, or increased sensitivity to light
- Risk of developing wet AMD. You should be monitored for signs of wet AMD and you should report any symptoms (eg, visual distortion, deterioration in vision, black spots, loss of central vision) to your healthcare provider
- Episodes of eye inflammation. You should report any symptoms (eg, pain or discomfort, redness, swelling, or sensitivity to light, small specks floating in your vision, changes in vision) to your healthcare provider

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION (CONT'D)

SYFOVRE can cause serious side effects (cont'd):

- Increase in eye pressure within minutes of the injection. Your healthcare provider will monitor this after each injection

Before receiving SYFOVRE:

- **Tell your healthcare provider if any of the following applies to you:**
  - If you have a history of seeing flashes of light or small specks floating in your vision and if you have a sudden increase of size and number of these specks
  - If you have high pressure in the eye or if you have glaucoma
- **Tell your healthcare provider about all of your medical conditions,** including
  - If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, think you may be pregnant, or are planning to have a baby, ask your doctor for advice before taking this medicine
- **Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take,** including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements

What should I avoid while receiving SYFOVRE?

- After an injection or an eye exam, your eyesight may temporarily be impaired. Do not drive or use machinery until your vision recovers

What are the most common side effects of SYFOVRE?

- Eye discomfort
- Wet age-related macular degeneration
- Small specks floating in vision
- Blood in the white of the eye

These are not all the possible side effects of SYFOVRE. Tell your healthcare provider about any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away.

Call your healthcare provider for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to the FDA at **1-800-FDA-1088** or **www.fda.gov/medwatch.**

Please see additional Important Safety Information on the previous pages and Brief Summary on the adjacent page.

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Important facts about SYFOVRE
This summary contains risk and safety information for patients about SYFOVRE. It does not include all the information about SYFOVRE and does not take the place of talking to your eye doctor about your medical condition or treatment.

What is SYFOVRE?
SYFOVRE is a prescription eye injection, used to treat geographic atrophy (GA), the dry advanced form of age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

How is SYFOVRE given?
SYFOVRE is an injection administered by your eye doctor into the eye.

What is the most important information I should know about SYFOVRE?

Who should NOT receive SYFOVRE?
Do not receive SYFOVRE if you have an infection in or around your eye or have active swelling in or around your eye that may include pain and redness.

SYFOVRE can cause serious side effects:
Injection into the eye with SYFOVRE can result in an infection in the eye or retinal detachment (separation of retina from back of the eye) can occur.

- Call your healthcare provider right away if you have redness of the eye, eye pain, increased discomfort, worsening eye redness, blurred or decreased vision, an increased number of small specks floating in your vision, flashes of light, or increased sensitivity to light

Risk of developing wet AMD. You should be monitored for signs of wet AMD and you should report any symptoms (eg, visual distortion, deterioration in vision, black spots, loss of central vision) to your healthcare provider.

Episodes of eye inflammation. You should report any symptoms (eg, pain or discomfort, redness, swelling, or sensitivity to light, small specks floating in your vision, changes in vision) to your healthcare provider.

Increase in eye pressure within minutes of the injection. Your healthcare provider will monitor this after each injection.

Before receiving SYFOVRE:
Tell your healthcare provider if any of the following applies to you:

- If you have a history of seeing flashes of light or small specks floating in your vision and if you have a sudden increase of size and number of these specks
- If you have high pressure in the eye or if you have glaucoma

Tell your healthcare provider about all of your medical conditions, including if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. If you think you may be pregnant, or are planning to have a baby, ask your doctor for advice before taking this medicine.

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements.

What should I avoid while receiving SYFOVRE?
After an injection with SYFOVRE or an eye exam, your eyesight may temporarily be impaired. Do not drive or use machinery until your vision recovers.

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You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088 or www.fda.gov/medwatch.

Where can I learn more about SYFOVRE?
For a more comprehensive review of SYFOVRE safety and risk information, talk to your healthcare provider and see the full Prescribing Information at SYFOVRE.com.

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HEALTH & FITNESS BY JENNIFER CAMPBELL

Photos from Envato

12 ways to boost your energy

With less daylight coming in each day, many people feel less energetic and more prone to sitting on the couch, straying from healthy habits. Here are a dozen ways to increase your energy and make the most of your time:

Exercise daily. Exercise helps your cells burn energy and circulate more oxygen in your blood, making you more alert. The dopamine release not only elevates your mood, but improves movement, memory and focus.

Stay hydrated. Among the first signs of dehydration are fatigue and feeling lethargic. Make sure you're also getting enough electrolytes through water consumption; you need a balance of sodium and potassium.

Limit alcohol. It may make you sleepy initially, but alcohol is a major sleep disrupter. You may find you're waking up in the middle of the night and having difficulty falling back asleep. It also limits the amount of REM and deep sleep.

Reduce stress. Anxiety, fear and anger spike cortisol levels, creating inflammation and consuming a massive amount of energy. Seeing a therapist to work through anxiety and anger can have major benefits. Meditation, hypnosis and yoga are effective in cutting stress.

Cut unhealthy carbs. Processed foods high in carbohydrates can leave you feeling tired. Simple carbs – found in sugar and starchy, processed foods – provide a quick boost but are immediately followed by a crash from rapid spikes and drops in blood sugar levels.

Consider a vitamin B supplement. B12 supports energy production and maintains blood cell health. If you're deficient, an early sign can be low energy.

Take a nap. Research by the National Institute of Mental Health found afternoon naps improved cognitive function, especially alertness.

Go for a walk. If you feel sluggish, get up and move, especially after a meal. A brisk 10-minute walk improved energy with effects lasting up to two hours, in experiments conducted by California State University.

Be strategic about caffeine. A cup or two of coffee or tea can help enhance mental clarity. But to get the right benefits, consume caffeine judiciously. Chronically high consumption can lead to adrenal dysfunction, throwing energy and sleep cycles off.

Improve sleep quality. One-third of Amercicans don't get the amounts of regular uninterrupted sleep needed for our bodies to repair themselves. Head to bed earlier, and maintain a sleep schedule.

Cool it. Heat can make us more relaxed and sleepy. Try a cold shower, or even a cold plunge or ice bath. Lower the thermostat before bed; experts say 65 degrees is the perfect temperature for optimal sleep.

Get your labs checked. Thyroid issues, anemia, depression and certain medications may cause fatigue. If you're experiencing low energy levels, talk to your doctor to rule out any underlying conditions.

Army veteran Jennifer Campbell is a certified personal trainer with a master's degree in nutrition education. She is past commander of the California American Legion's 24th District and Hollywood Post 43.

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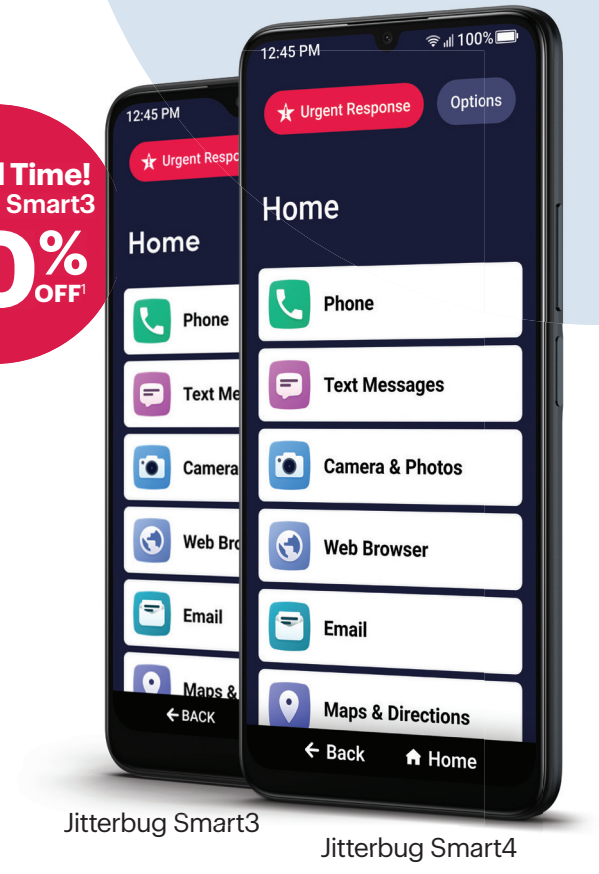

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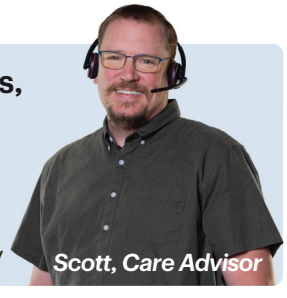

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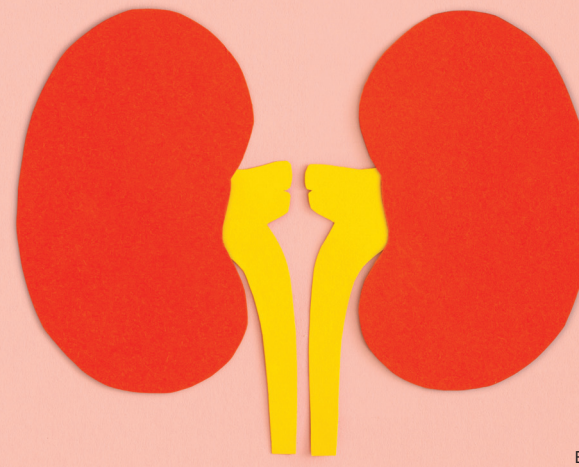
How to protect your kidneys

BY MARK L. FUERST



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Chronic kidney disease (CKD) in the United States is at a record high, with 37 million Americans living with the condition, including 7.7% of veterans.

Each year, about 13,000 veterans transition to maintenance dialysis in the more than 6,000 dialysis units in approximately 70 VA dialysis centers to treat their CKD.

In general, more male veterans (8.2%) have CKD than female veterans (2.7%), and compared to white veterans (6.9%), Black veterans have the highest rates of CKD (12.7%), followed by Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders (10.1%).

Kidneys filter extra water and waste out of your blood to make urine. When the kidneys are damaged and can't filter the way they should, this can cause wastes to build up in the body. For most people, kidney damage occurs slowly over many years, often due to diabetes or high blood pressure (CKD). You may also have a sudden loss in kidney function because of illness, injury or taking certain medications, called acute kidney injury.

Many with kidney disease don't see symptoms until the damage is advanced. Blood and urine tests are the most common way to diagnose it. Veterans who have diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease or a close family member with kidney disease may want to talk with their VA health-care provider about getting tested.

Lifestyle changes that can protect you from kidney disease include controlling your blood pressure, managing blood sugar, losing weight if overweight, quitting smoking, getting enough sleep, limiting alcohol intake, and stress-reducing exercises such as meditation, yoga and tai chi.

Cut back on salt and added sugars, and limit the amount of phosphorus and potassium in your diet, which can build up in your blood if you have CKD.

Being physically active can also make a difference. Researchers at the Washington (D.C.) VA Medical Center have determined that a veteran's fitness level affects the risk of developing kidney disease. Exercise guidelines recommend engaging in 150 minutes per week of a physical activity that feels moderately hard, like brisk walking, biking or jogging.

If you are diagnosed with kidney disease, you can continue to live a productive life working, enjoying friends and family, and staying physically active. But you may need to adjust your diet and lifestyle to help you live a healthier, longer life.

Mark L. Fuerst is a Brooklyn-based health and fitness writer.

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U.S. sales of pumpkin-flavored products in the year ending July 29, up 42% from 2019. "There are pumpkin spice Oreos, protein drinks, craft beers, cereals and even Spam," CBS News reports. "A search of 'pumpkin spice' on Walmart's website brings up more than 1,000 products."

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Former Army Capt. Larry L. Taylor speaks with guests after receiving the Medal of Honor at the White House in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 5.
Army photo by Henry Villarama

'The answer was easy'

Vietnam War helicopter pilot Larry Taylor is the third Medal of Honor recipient from Chattanooga Post 14.

BY MATT GRILLS

With room for only two crew members, the AH-1 Cobra attack helicopter wasn't meant to extract troops, but Army 1st Lt. Larry Taylor pulled it off the night of June 18, 1968.

Responding to a call for air support from a long-range reconnaissance patrol (LRP) team surrounded by North Vietnamese troops, the pilot and his wingman held off the enemy for more than a half hour before learning a rescue with a UH-1 "Huey" had been canceled. Low on fuel and out of ammunition, Taylor decided he'd get the four men out on his gunship – something never attempted. Landing under heavy fire, he gave them enough time to grab onto the Cobra's rocket pods and skids, then flew them to safety.

On Sept. 5, President Biden awarded the Medal of Honor to Taylor at the White House, 55 years after the pilot endangered his own life to save fellow soldiers from certain death. Taylor is the 33rd Tennessean to receive the nation's highest military award for valor, and the third from American Legion Post 14 in Chattanooga, Tenn.

"I just did what common sense told me to do, and it worked out," said Taylor, 81, who left the Army in 1970 with the rank of captain.

Post 14's other Medal of Honor recipients are Army medic Desmond Doss, who rescued 75 wounded at Okinawa, and Charles Coolidge, who led a group of outnumbered soldiers in a standoff against German forces in 1944. Doss died in 2006; Coolidge died in 2021.

"We're tickled to death," said Carl Levi, a retired Tennessee Army National Guard brigadier general and former Post 14 commander. "I'm proud to have known them all and called them friend."

Taylor's Medal of Honor presentation concludes a six-year effort led by Dave Hill, the LRP team's last living member, to upgrade the Silver Star award the pilot received for his actions. In 2017, Hill wrote to then-Sen. Bob Corker requesting help. A long correspondence with Army Human Resources Command followed, with Hill eventually tracking down Taylor's co-pilot for a second witness statement. Once the Army Board for Correction of Military Records was satisfied it had "new, substantive and relevant information" not known to Taylor's command at the time of its award decision, its recommendation for an upgrade went to the Pentagon for approval.

Larry Taylor flew more than 2,000 combat missions in UH-1 and Cobra helicopters.
Photo courtesy National Medal of Honor Heritage Center

"Nothing happened fast during this process, nor should it have," Hill said. "This is a high honor, and the Army's very particular about who gets it."

On July 7, Biden called to congratulate Taylor, who insisted he was just caught doing his job.

"I told him, 'Now, Mr. President, I thought you had to do something specific and extraordinary to receive the Medal of Honor,' and he said, 'I've read your 201 file. Believe me, you qualify.'"

A graduate of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Taylor was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army Reserve in 1966. He completed the armor officers basic course at Fort Knox, Ky., before deciding he'd rather fly. Taylor qualified as an aviator in 1967 and was assigned to one of the first Cobra companies in Vietnam.

Serving with D Troop, 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 1st Infantry Division, Taylor flew over 2,000 combat missions in UH-1 and Cobra helicopters. According to the Army, his decorations include 43 Air Medals, a Bronze Star and two Distinguished Flying Crosses.

As Cobra pilots, "we were on scramble status 24 hours a day," Taylor said. "You'd refuel, rearm, go find a shady spot and maybe sleep for 30 minutes. The horn would go off and there you'd go again. I never flew a mission in my underdrawers and flip-flops, but I was pretty close."

Taylor needed just two minutes to be in the air and en route – including the night he flew to support Hill's LRP team near the hamlet of Ap Go Cong, northeast of Saigon.

The four soldiers – team leader Bob Elsner, assistant team leader Hill, grenadier Bill Cohn and radioman Gerald Patty of F Company, 52nd Infantry (LRP), 1st Infantry Division, call sign "Wildcat 2" – had inadvertently walked into a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) staging area. Using their night vision scope, they saw the closest enemy troops were 50 meters away, and that they were surrounded.

Moving to a corner of the rice paddy, the team radioed for gunship support and emergency helicopter extraction. Soon, they saw the running lights of two Cobras a klick or two to the north.

Taylor and his wingman, Capt. Roger Trickler, put a "steel curtain" around the team, making low-level attack runs. During the battle, the two gunships fired 152 rockets and nearly 16,000 machine-rounds at enemy positions.

"They just blew the hell out of everything around us," Hill said.

Told by division senior officers that the team had been trained to "escape and evade," Taylor did a quick recon and saw that their only viable E&E route was littered with ambush sites.

"If they'd have gone north, they'd have been captured," he said. "If they'd have gone south, they'd have drowned in the river. How many people do you know who can swim with a 25-pound (radio) around their neck?"

Taylor directed Trickler to fire his remaining minigun rounds along the team's western flank

and return to base camp; he fired his own remaining rounds along their eastern flank. Finally able to break out, the four soldiers bolted to a new extraction point Taylor had designated.

The gunship was on the ground for 10 seconds. Elsner and Patty hugged the starboard-side landing skid; Hill and Cohn jumped up on the rocket pods. "We were riding backwards, like Aladdin on his magic carpet," Hill says.

Taylor flew the men to a water treatment plant in friendly territory, where they clambered off to catch a glimpse of their savior – a helmeted head on the other side of a cockpit.

"We got in front of his ship, pulled off a salute, and he was gone," Hill said.

Thirty years passed before Hill actually met Taylor, at a 1st Infantry Division Long Range Patrol-Ranger reunion in Branson, Mo. "It was great to finally see him and express our gratitude," he said. "He's been to at least half our reunions since 1999. He's become part of us."

Had Taylor not taken the action he did, he and his teammates would have been killed, Hill said. Down to their last magazines, they had only their KA-BAR knives to defend themselves. They learned later that an additional NVA company had been headed to Ap Go Cong to bolster the unit attacking the LRP team.

Moreover, Taylor put himself in grave danger. His helicopter took 16 bullet strikes, and he expended all his ammo and nearly all his fuel to give the team time to find a way out. When that failed, he became their way out.

"He's always had a kind of 'aw shucks' attitude about it, but what he did was above and beyond the call of duty, and certainly at the risk of his own life," Hill said.

After the war, the story of the pilot's feat spread, making its way into books, newspapers and even Army Ranger School curriculum. Support grew for upgrading Taylor's Silver Star.

Popular demand, however, isn't a factor in Medal of Honor recommendations. And rarely will a military board be convinced that the chain of command made an error.

"I've dealt with dozens of awards for heroism in my leadership role in the Army, and my first thought was, 'I've heard this before,'" said retired four-star Army Gen. B.B. Bell, chairman of the Charles H. Coolidge National Medal of Honor Heritage Center's advisory board and member of Post 14. "So I kind of pushed back on these guys for a while. Then I got a call from Dave Hill. No longer was it a secondhand story."

Knowing the Army needed information that was not available to Taylor's chain of command in 1968, Bell began looking at the larger picture: the chaos of the Tet Offensive, the stationing of Taylor's and Hill's units, and – crucially – the death of the Big Red One's commander three months after Taylor's actions. As division commander, he'd have been the one to recommend Taylor for the Medal of Honor.

Plus, Hill and his teammates were never interviewed about their rescue.

"The Army never questioned the truth of the stories, but it assumed all along those stories were documented," Bell said. "They weren't. It was a matter ultimately of not ferreting out so much new information, but writing it down properly, certifying it was true and correct, and showing how it could not possibly have been available to the chain of command."

Hill calls Bell "the spark plug we needed," but Bell gives full credit to Hill for refusing to give up until the man who saved his life – and the lives of his teammates – was properly recognized.

Chris Dooley, a retired Air Force colonel and commander of Post 14, has known Taylor for 10 years and long supported the push to upgrade his Silver Star. "It's a great honor for Post 14 to now have three Medal of Honor recipients," he said, "but I think Larry is also a reflection of the Chattanooga community and the patriotic spirit we have here in this area."

Having met Taylor many times, Bell said he's "a normal guy from East Tennessee who went off and served his country and got caught up in something that's important to warriors," which is brotherhood.

"He couldn't go back to base camp knowing he hadn't done everything he could to try to save those men. The answer was easy for Larry. He put his life on the line, went in, and saved their lives. God knows how he got away with it."

Matt Grills is managing editor of The American Legion Magazine.

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LOUD AND CLEAR

Outgoing commander says Legion's messages are resonating.

Photo by Jeric Wilhelmsen

Addressing the 104th National Convention in Charlotte, N.C., on Aug. 29, outgoing National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola said The American Legion's Be the One suicide-prevention message is spreading – and that the formation of a new coalition offers an opportunity to reach an even bigger audience.

"During my travels, I have had conversations with family members whose veteran attempted or, in some cases, took their lives by suicide," Troiola said. "The pain those families feel will always be there, but our Be the One message is resonating. Just as we advocate for veterans, these families are advocating for us. They want us to continue to make this our top priority."

In July, the Legion's National Executive Commission passed a resolution allowing the organization to join USAA's Face the Fight Coalition. One of the key strategies of Face the Fight is to identify and support veterans at risk by partnering with, and investing in, VSOs and other groups to implement suicide prevention strategies within their organizations, teams and memberships.

A key part of the Legion's suicide-prevention strategy is the continuation of Buddy Checks, "which remind veterans that they are not alone – they have friends and allies in the American Legion Family," he said.

Troiola also spoke about the American Legion National Security Commission's BASE (Base Assessment and Servicemember Experience) initiative. The program strives to strengthen connections between the Legion, the Department of Defense, active-duty installations, and Guard and reserve centers and armories worldwide, to address food insecurity, military family health care, child care, career opportunities and more.

In the legislative arena, the Legion continues to support the Afghan Adjustment Act, which Troiola said "would provide a pathway to permanent residency for Afghans who have been granted humanitarian parole in the United States, and create pathways for continued relocation for those who've been left behind.

"Every day we are losing allies and their families to torture and death by a hostile regime that is punishing them for helping us. We owe them special consideration."

Other legislation on the Legion's front burner is the Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act of 2023.

"Because the Coast Guard, unlike the other branches, falls under the Department of Homeland Security, its personnel go unpaid during prolonged shutdowns," Troiola said. "The American Legion fully remembers the (government) shutdown of 2019. During that period, we provided more than $1 million of Temporary Financial Assistance to Coast Guard families in need.

"We did our job. Now Congress needs to do the same."

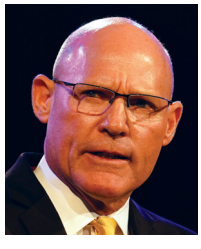
– Steven B. Brooks

"With the Legion's support, we have delivered more support and more benefits to veterans than at any time in our nation's history. All that work adds up to the only statistic that matters: veterans' lives saved or veterans' lives improved by the work we have done together."

VA Secretary Denis McDonough, praising The American Legion's influence on law and policy, from passage of the PACT Act to reducing veteran suicide and homelessness

"Get these younger veterans involved with something ... he or she is looking for. We've got to keep bringing them on board, putting them in leadership roles and showing them (the Legion is) a viable, living, ever-changing organization that is there for the veteran."

Retired Army Col. Harold Fritz, Medal of Honor recipient and member of American Legion Post 24 in Lake Geneva, Wis., on the importance of recruiting – and then involving – younger veterans



"Immediately after taking the mantle, I went and visited all our veterans service organizations ....Before my first year ended, we were first in the district and first in the nation. I did not do that. My recruiters are good, but it was those community influencers – it was you, the get-it-done groups."

Retired Sgt. Maj. Micheal P. Barrett, 17th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, describing how American Legion posts and members helped him in his recruitment efforts

Waco Hoover, left, leads a symposium discussion with Ian Kratter, a clinical assistant professor at the Brain Stimulation Lab at Stanford University School of Medicine, and Juliana Mercer, a Marine Corps veteran and director of veteran advocacy at Healing Breakthrough. Photo by Jennifer Blohm

'Ground zero' for reducing veteran suicide rate

Fifty percent of Americans believe seeking mental-health help is a sign of weakness, while the percentage is 75% for the veteran community, new research shows.

Those figures represent the challenge in combating the escalating rate of veteran suicide. That topic and others were explored by Dr. David Rudd, a leading expert on PTSD and veteran suicide, and David Berkenfield, a retired Navy SEAL and team manager with Chip Ganassi Racing, during The American Legion's inaugural Be the One Symposium on Aug. 28.

Held at the NASCAR Hall of Fame, the symposium drew attention to the Legion's Be the One mission, which is focused on reducing the rate of suicide among veterans and servicemembers. The daylong event featured leading experts in post-traumatic stress disorder, veterans suicide, various therapies and more.

"This is ground zero for discussing actionable solutions to solve the problem of veteran suicide and for continuing the conversation after we leave here," said Amy Forsythe, a combat veteran, journalist and host of the Be the One podcast; episodes are available as part of the Tango Alpha Lima podcast feed.

Marine Corps veteran Waco Hoover, who directs the strategy for Be the One, assembled the panel. "The first stage of this is creating awareness," he said, "to let it be known that it is OK to not be OK."

– Henry Howard

"What we have seen in my community in the last few years is the continued increase of suicide. This is something that means a lot to me."

David Berkenfield, retired Navy SEAL and team manager with Chip Ganassi Racing

"Be justifiably proud when you watch this movie to know that it is our Navy and Marine Corps pilots on those planes to make this movie happen."

Retired Navy Cmdr. Frank Weisser, a Blue Angels pilot who took part in filming "Top Gun: Maverick." As he spoke, video clips showed Weisser and others flying and landing aircraft. "Paramount's perception was the actors can act," he said. "What they cannot do is act like they're in a fighter. But they can act while in a fighter. So we did that."

"The work we've done in DPAA and its predecessor organizations have provided answers to those families to give them peace, to give them a place they can go (to) honor that loved one."

Johnie Webb, who retired as deputy director for outreach and communications for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, after 28 years with the agency. Webb received an American Legion Patriot Award for his work on repatriation efforts and for hosting Legion delegations to DPAA facilities in Hawaii.

"I know full well the value of The American Legion. You help protect some of the most precious tributes of our country, and it's most appreciated. We at First Liberty for 20 years have been standing alongside the Legion as we've tried to protect these rights."

David Holmes, executive vice president of First Liberty Institute, which received the Legion's Distinguished Service Medal for its work to protect religious freedom before the nation's highest courts. Among those successful efforts were the defense of a high school football coach's right to pray on the field to saving the Bladensburg World War I veterans memorial.

"I've been in racing for over 30 years, and I've never been involved in a program that touches so many people. Every city we go to throughout the country, our team will go by a (Legion) post and tell them how what's going on there connects with what we're doing at the racetrack .... (these veterans) know they can come up to me at any time and just start talking about what the program's about, where they're from, how they served, where they served and what it meant to serve."

Chip Ganassi, owner of Chip Ganassi Racing, which received an American Legion Patriot Award during a fireside chat at the national convention

"If you look at our military family today, compared with 30-something years ago when I came in, it looks very different. You have more people who are dual working, and you have more single parents .... Child care is a readiness issue."

19th Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force JoAnne Bass, at a military quality of life panel discussion put on by the National Security Commission

"We're going to be veterans a lot longer than we were on active duty ... we want to make sure we have the resources in place to help them where we can."

James Rodriguez, assistant secretary of the Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service, speaking to the Veterans Employment & Education Commission

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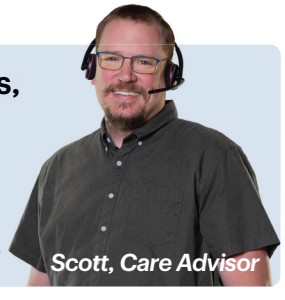

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Photo by Hilary Ott

A promise fulfilled

The American Legion Riders smashed their record in fundraising for the American Legion Legacy Scholarship, one last time.

This year's Legacy Run brought in a record $1,551,631, for a total of nearly $20 million raised since 2006. More than $667,000 was raised during and prior to the ride, and $884,000 in donations was presented on the convention floor.

"Thanks to your generosity, we're making dreams come true and fulfilling the promise we made back in 2001 to never forget the children of the fallen and those who have come home carrying both the visible and invisible scars of war," said Legacy Run Chief Road Captain Mark Clark, chairman of the Riders' National Advisory Committee. "None of this would have been possible without the entire American Legion Family."

Starting next year, the Legacy Run will raise funds for the American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation, which funds the Temporary Financial Assistance program and training and accreditation costs for American Legion service officers.

"With the passage of the PACT Act, there's never been a time we needed more trained and certified service officers, and the Legion is rising to meet that challenge," Clark said. "The American Legion Riders will assist in that effort .... stick with us and help us make this transition a successful one."

– Steven B. Brooks

Award recipients

Distinguished Service Medal
First Liberty Institute

Patriot Awards
Hon. Timothy K. Moore, Johnie E. Webb Jr., Chip Ganassi Racing

National Concert Band Contest
Joliet (Ill.) American Legion Band

National Color Guard Contests
- *Advancing/Retrieving Colors* – Newport Harbor Post 291, Newport Beach, Calif., 94.6
- *Military* – Newport Harbor, 90.6
- *Military Open* – Dorie Miller Post 331, Orlando, 82.05
- *NJROTC Open (with associated American Legion post)* – West Caldwell High School, Lenoir, N.C. (Post 29), 98.75
- *Overall Champion* – Newport Harbor

National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Patrol Officer Audrey Arbuckle, Crete, Neb.

National Firefighter of the Year John DeBisschop III, Naugatuck, Conn.

100 Percent Americanism Award Fox Sports

Fourth Estate Awards
Broadcast – ABC Action News (WFTS-TV) I-Team, Tampa, Fla./Adam Walser
Print – *Military Times*/Leo Shane

Spirit of Service Awards
- Air Force Staff Sgt. Joseph M. Allen
- Space Force Spc. 3 Tyler J. Baker
- Marine Corps Sgt. Nhatalyne Bordes
- Army Sgt. Christopher Irvine
- Coast Guard Petty Officer 3rd Class Ryan Knick
- Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Dhruva S. Poluru
- Navy Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Justin D. Santoyo

National Recruiter of the Year Patricia E. Liddell, Midland, Ga.

Race to the Top (district commanders whose membership on March 31 represented greatest percentage increase over previous year)
- Hector Rodriguez, Guaynabo, Puerto Rico
- Casey R. Nash, Midway, Ga.
- Joyce A. Hannum, Chagrin Falls, Ohio
- Billy J. Hill, Brandywine, Md.

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Retired Navy SEAL Master Chief Sean Dowling, retired Navy SEAL Senior Chief Mark Tangey and Chip Ganassi Racing Extreme E team manager Dave Berkenfield, from left, conduct a fireside chat about veteran suicide prevention. Photo by Hilary Ott

A life saved, thanks to Be the One

"I'm done. Leaving hospital. I don't give a s---. Not a f------ person is listening to anything I'm saying. Trust me, Dave, if I was good before, I am not now. I don't give a f--- about anything right now."

"Buddy, we love you. We want to see you succeed and thrive. We want to help you find that."

"Death is better than this. I don't say that lightly."

That was the beginning of a text exchange between two retired Navy SEAL senior chiefs. Such dialogue is not uncommon among veterans who struggle with PTSD, TBI and other invisible wounds from their time in service. But what makes this story stand out is that it demonstrates the power of one. David Berkenfield was the one responding immediately to the text message from Mark Tangey, who was in a dark place. Sean Dowling, a mutual friend, also stepped up as one to support Tangey in his time of need.

The three veterans captivated an audience of American Legion Family members during the general session. Their story resonated with the crowd and demonstrated the power of the Be the One mission to reduce the rate of veteran suicide.

Berkenfield led the conversation, recapping the moment Tangey reached out and the 18 or so months that have passed since that day: "The fact we have this group on the stage here, the fact we have Mark sitting next to me willing to be here on this stage, is monumental."

Mentor. Leader. Trusted adviser. Those were among the words Berkenfield and Dowling used to describe Tangey. "He was like the glue that kept the young guys together," Dowling said. "He kept the morale up. It's like a leader you want underneath you because there's not a lot to it .... You just let him go and he manages it just fine,

Continued on page 34

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Continued from page 32

which is what you want. And that's the greatest thing I remember about Mark, (his) keeping the morale up. He had the magic.

"We kind of saw a little bit of the writing on the wall with the decisions he was making. When he was going down, we had to do something about it. This is too much of a good guy to let go. And that's what that text was, was a cry for help."

Tangey looked back on his spiral, which included getting in trouble with his family and the law. "I don't think I had any kind of outlet to get anything done if I didn't have the connection I had with these two guys," he said, acknowledging his traumatic brain injuries. "It mixed my brain up past where I remember it being before, and it caught me off guard."

'Losing the bubble' For some servicemembers, the transition back to civilian life can be challenging. Tangey was downsized from a contracting gig. He was without his tribe. And he had a series of motorcycle crashes – multiple ones involving deer, and another with a different type of wildlife. "An owl hit me in the face and knocked me out on my bike," Tangey recalled, bringing some levity to the conversation.

As their friend spiraled downward, Berkenfield and Dowling knew they had to do something. But what? "Sean and I started getting notifications through our teammates, through our friends, through Mark's friends, that Mark was losing the bubble a little bit – was not connected, disassociated, not prioritizing the important things in his life," Berkenfield said.

Following his motorcycle crashes, Tangey showed symptoms of concussions: impulsive behavior, loss of rational decision-making, aggressive anger, short-fused, pulled back, feeling remote and distant, uninterested in life, dangerous inhibition.

That's when Tangey's wife, Elena, reached out and called Berkenfeld – an example of how a spouse or partner can also "be the one."

"We're in deep trouble," she said. "We need help. You are the only person I know to call."

Berkenfeld immediately flew to Virginia and summoned Dowling. With Elena, they began to formulate a plan. "We had no guidance. We didn't have a clinical psychologist to call who said, 'Do this.' We were navigating murky waters," Berkenfield said.

Together, the three formed a support network to do daily check-ins on Tangey, look at financial options, navigate the complicated VA process and anything else necessary. In doing so, Tangey became part of a revitalized tribe.

"I knew from my past how much I trust these guys and love them, and same with my family," he said. "And pretty much that is what made me able to reach out or even open up and trust them in my head. My head didn't want to trust anybody, including them, and it would constantly mess with me and it still does. I just have to focus on the fact that I know my family loves me and I know these guys love me, and that's all that matters to me."

Still a challenge Eighteen months after the urgent text messaging, the tribe continues its support for Tangey. "Life's a journey," Berkenfield said. "Every day is still challenging .... it's just one thing after another, but we're going to keep fighting. Sean and I are going to keep fighting. Elena's going to keep fighting. Mark's going to keep fighting. And today I think is a really important moment because Mark is sitting on the stage. If we look at this conversation 18 months ago, he wouldn't have volunteered. Not a chance."

Tangey appreciates the support. "I have an amazing group of people around me," he said. "My family's amazing and my friends are amazing, my best friends and brothers. I'm just super appreciative because a lot of this stuff I can't figure out for myself anymore."

Other veterans, unknown to family and friends, may be on a path similar to Tangey's. And that's where Be the One comes in. "If you can prevent one, it makes everything worth it," Dowling said. "Keep an ear open for it. It comes subtle. Then talking to people who maybe know them more closely, I could say just be aware of it. A takeaway from today is just care. Just care about it. Just take care of your brother."

Berkenfield closed the chat by encouraging the audience to follow their lead when the situation arises: "Very simply, be involved, all right?"

– Henry Howard

Read more of Tangey's story: ***betheone.org***

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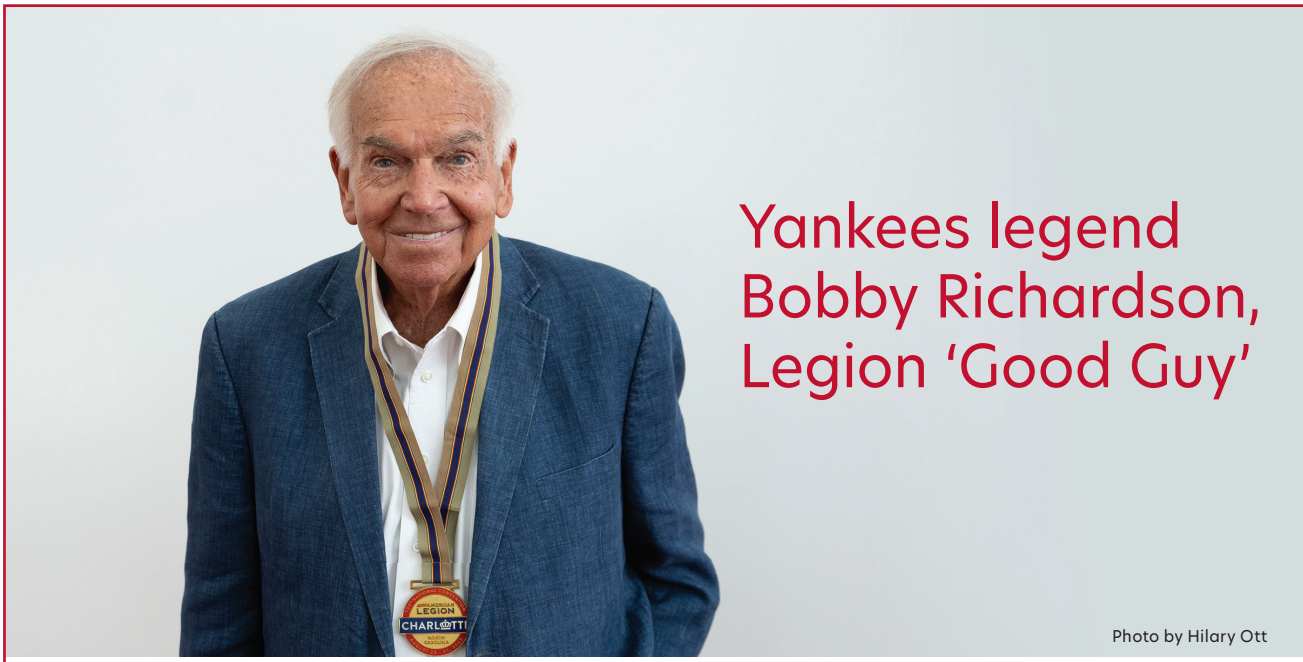

Yankees legend Bobby Richardson, Legion 'Good Guy'

Photo by Hilary Ott

On the all-time list of famous New York Yankees, Bobby Richardson probably doesn't crack the top 10. Yet he holds an impressive major league record: most runs batted in (RBI) in a single World Series. His legendary 1960 performance, in which he drove in 12 runs, also earned him the distinction of being the only player selected from a losing team as World Series MVP. When he retired, Richardson was a member of three world championship teams and an eight-time All-Star second baseman.

A strong supporter of American Legion Baseball, Richardson was honored by the Past Department Commanders' Club as its 2023 James V. Day "Good Guy," for his character and patriotism.

How did American Legion Baseball help you develop as a player?

I went out for the high school team as a freshman. We had a three-day workout, and the coach said, "Richardson, you come out (again) next year." And my dad said, "Why don't you go out for the American Legion team?" I did, and not only did we win the state championship, we won the regional championship and were playing in Charlotte against Richmond, Va. The winner would go to the American Legion World Series in Omaha. And before that last game they took us out to see "Pride of the Yankees," and I became a Yankees fan. When I got to the Legion game that night, there was a Yankees scout there. And he came over to me after I hit some balls in the hole and said, "I can promise you when you graduate, you will get a chance to sign with the Yankees." He kept his word. And that was the start of my association with American Legion Baseball.

The Yankees of the '50s and '60s are one of the greatest dynasties in sports. What made those teams so special?

At 19, I was called up to the Yankees, and we were in the World Series nine of the first 10 years I played. We had one year, 1959, when we didn't win and we just didn't know how to act: "What happened? Why didn't we win this year?" So it was a great time to play, and I had great teammates.

Who was your favorite teammate?

Everybody has a favorite, and mine was Mickey Mantle. That first day I worked out, I was standing around the cage. I wasn't about to walk in front of Hank Bauer and Yogi Berra. Mantle came up, put his arm around me and said, "Come here, kid. Step in here and take some swings." And it started a friendship that lasted a lifetime. A dozen years in New York, and after baseball we were even closer friends.

You're the only major leaguer to have won World Series MVP on a team that didn't win. That has to be a great honor mixed with disappointment.

A lot of disappointment. The thing I remember most is that we had lost and Mantle was crying. He felt like we had a better ball club, and he was actually crying in the clubhouse when Ed Fitzgerald of *SPORT* magazine walked in and told me that I had been named most valuable player. And Mickey said that at least we got something good out of it.

I went down the next day and picked out the

Continued on page 38

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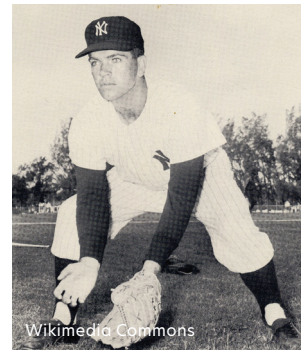
Continued from page 36

Corvette and drove it down to South Carolina. And I'm so dumb – I had two boys at the time, and it was a two-seater – I took it down and traded it for a Jeep. I only had 26 RBIs that year, but in that World Series in 1960 I ended up with a record that still stands: most RBIs in a World Series. But you have to have men on base to drive them in.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One of my biggest thrills is The American Legion picked me to be player of the year. In '63, I was given a Lou Gehrig Memorial Award from Columbia University. I remember so well when he stood on home base and knew he was dying and talked about his time with the Yankees. I was fortunate that I was the 10th Yankee to have a day at Yankee Stadium and I got to stand on the same home plate and say, as Lou Gehrig did, how fortunate I was to be a Yankee, and mean it.

Besides playing and coaching, what are some other activities have had meaning for you?

The Fellowship of Christian Athletes. I've been on their national board and actually went to work for them when I retired from baseball. And there were other ministries as well I got involved in. At that time Youth for Christ was real big, and there was a film made of my life called "The Bobby Richardson Story." And then the Lord just seemed to open doors, five times with Billy Graham on national television … I went to Okinawa, Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma, Patrick Air Force Base in Florida. Everything opened up because of baseball, and it all started because of The American Legion.

How did you feel about being selected as The American Legion's 2023 James V. Day "Good Guy"?

Well, it's an honor, especially since I appreciate so much all of those who have served our country. I also appreciate the stand that American Legion (Baseball) has taken. They have each of the boys go out before every ballgame and repeat the rules – not just rules for baseball, but rules for life: Keep the rules. Keep faith in your teammates. Keep a stout heart in defeat. Keep your pride under in victory. Keep a sound soul, a clean mind, and a healthy body. So I learned these Legionnaires have been my friends. They not only love baseball, but they have meant so much for our country. I am honored to be so honored by them.

– John Raughter

Photo by Hilary Ott

HISTORIC GATHERING American Legion past national commanders pose for a photo with outgoing National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola before the National Commander's Banquet on Aug. 29.

FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Bill Oxford, Ric Santos, Denise Rohan, Mike Helm, Fang Wong, Charlie Schmidt
BACK ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Jim Koutz, Dale Barnett, Marty Conatser, Clarence Hill, Anthony Jordan, Dave Rehbein, Jake Comer, Brett Reistad, Paul Morin, Jimmie Foster, Paul Dillard, Jim Troiola, Dan Dellinger, Butch Miller, Daniel Ludwig, Tom Bock Photo by Hilary Ott

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Photo by Hilary Ott

Seehafer anticipates 'transformational' year

Following his election Aug. 31, American Legion National Commander Daniel J. Seehafer touted a "transformational" year for the American Legion Family, with continued legislative advocacy and a focus on fundraising for the Veterans & Children Foundation.

Meanwhile, the Legion's Be the One mission to reduce veteran suicide remains top priority.

"I believe the numbers (of daily veteran suicides) tend to be, let's say, undercounted," said Seehafer, a Navy and Navy Reserve veteran and member of American Legion Post 157 in Horicon, Wis. Created to reach veterans considering suicide or struggling with suicidal ideations, Be the One invites family members, friends, caregivers and civilians – anyone connected with a veteran – to help destigmatize the act of getting help. "It's OK to ask for help. It's OK not to be OK."

Seehafer, who served as national chaplain from 2010-2011, asked Legionnaires to join his "Operation Eye of the Tiger" membership challenge. "It's about family; it's about having, once again, that fire in the belly and knowing the relevance of who we are and what we can give to our communities, to our states, to our nation.

"With special focus on servant leadership, having competence and character and commitment, I truly believe we are at the forefront of rediscovering the value proposition of membership and legislative together, and the greater good that we, the Legion, bring to America by building more informed and civically engaged citizens."

– Steven B. Brooks

Resolutions of the 104th National Convention

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

47 Commends Bedford Boys Tribute Center for preserving D-Day history

NATIONAL SECURITY

30 Supports modernization of U.S. Armed Forces to ensure they are ready to fight and win in all domains of conflict, taking into account the evolving character of modern warfare

48 Calls for rebuilding U.S. defense industrial base

VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION

3 Calls for amending VA rating requirements for hypertension to align with broader medical community

4 Supports opening eligibility for government-issued markers on privately marked graves regardless of veteran's date of death

VETERANS EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION

13 Requests Congress pass requirement to give servicemembers the option to provide contact information to The American Legion's national office at discharge or retirement

14 Advocates for preservation of housing benefits for student veterans pursuing online education

18 Supports permanent authorization of 199A Qualified Business Income deduction for "pass-through" businesses

19 Calls for enhancing Work Opportunity Tax Credit for veteran workers and families

20 Supports tax-reducing policies and opposes tax increases that cause financial strain to military community

28 Applauds accelerated, expanded training in defense manufacturing

Read the full text of these and other resolutions online: **archive.legion.org**

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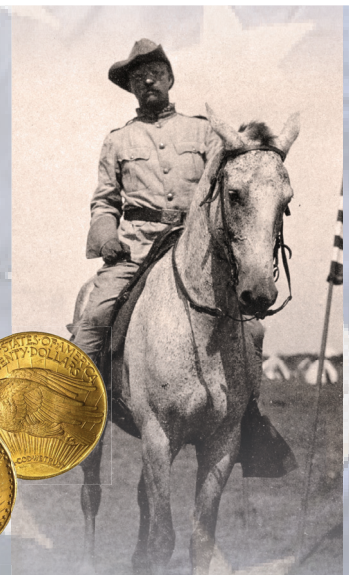

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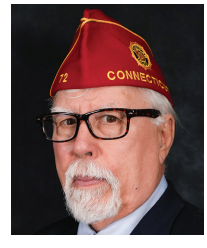
Randy D. Edwards
National Vice Commander
Home: Orem, Utah
Service branch: Army, Army National Guard, Army Reserve
Membership: Post 13, 44 years
Region: *Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Mexico, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Philippines, Utah, Washington, Wyoming*

William R. Roy
National Vice Commander
Home: Manchester, N.H.
Service branch: Navy
Membership: Post 2, 39 years
Region: *Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, France, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hamphire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont*

Robert "Mark" Shreve
National Vice Commander
Home: Ellerslie, Ga.
Service branch: Army
Membership: Post 189, 17 years
Region: *Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia, Wisconsin*

Raymond L. Vail
National Vice Commander
Home: Arma, Kan.
Service branch: Army
Membership: Post 182, 37 years
Region: *Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota*

Frank Carr
National Chaplain
Home: Halifax, Va.
Service branch: Air Force, Air Force Reserve, Army
Membership: Post 99, 51 years



Edward A. DeGumbia
National Historian
Home: Plantsville, Conn.
Service branch: Marine Corps
Membership: Post 72, 44 years

James W. Kell
National Sergeant-at-Arms
Home: Lomira, Wis.
Service branch: Navy
Membership: American Legion Post 157, 35 years

Read more about The American Legion's national officers online: ***legion.org/about/officers***

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

Lisa Williamson
National President
Membership: Unit 57, Fairbanks, Alaska, 30 years
Eligibility: Son, father, adoptive father

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TWO-TIME CHAMP

Alex Palou wins second INDYCAR championship, elevating The American Legion's Be the One message.

In the 2023 NTT INDYCAR Series season opener, Chip Ganassi Racing's Alex Palou drove the No. 10 American Legion Honda to an eighth-place finish. Few would have guessed that would actually tie for his worst finish of what became an incredible championship season.

In one of the most dominant seasons in recent INDYCAR history, Palou clinched the points championship and the Astor Cup after winning the BitNile.com Grand Prix of Portland on Sept. 3. It was the first time since 2007 that a driver had sealed the series title with one race remaining.

The championship is Palou's second in three years, this one with the 26-year-old driving the American Legion livery featuring the Be the One message in 12 races. Three of Palou's wins came in the No. 10 American Legion Honda, including the clincher at the start of Suicide Prevention Awareness Month.

"I never thought I would be an INDYCAR champion, and to be a two-time INDYCAR champion feels amazing, like a dream," Palou said after winning in Portland. "And it's extra special for The American Legion's Be the One. It's (Suicide Prevention Awareness Month), so hopefully that helps a lot of people now."

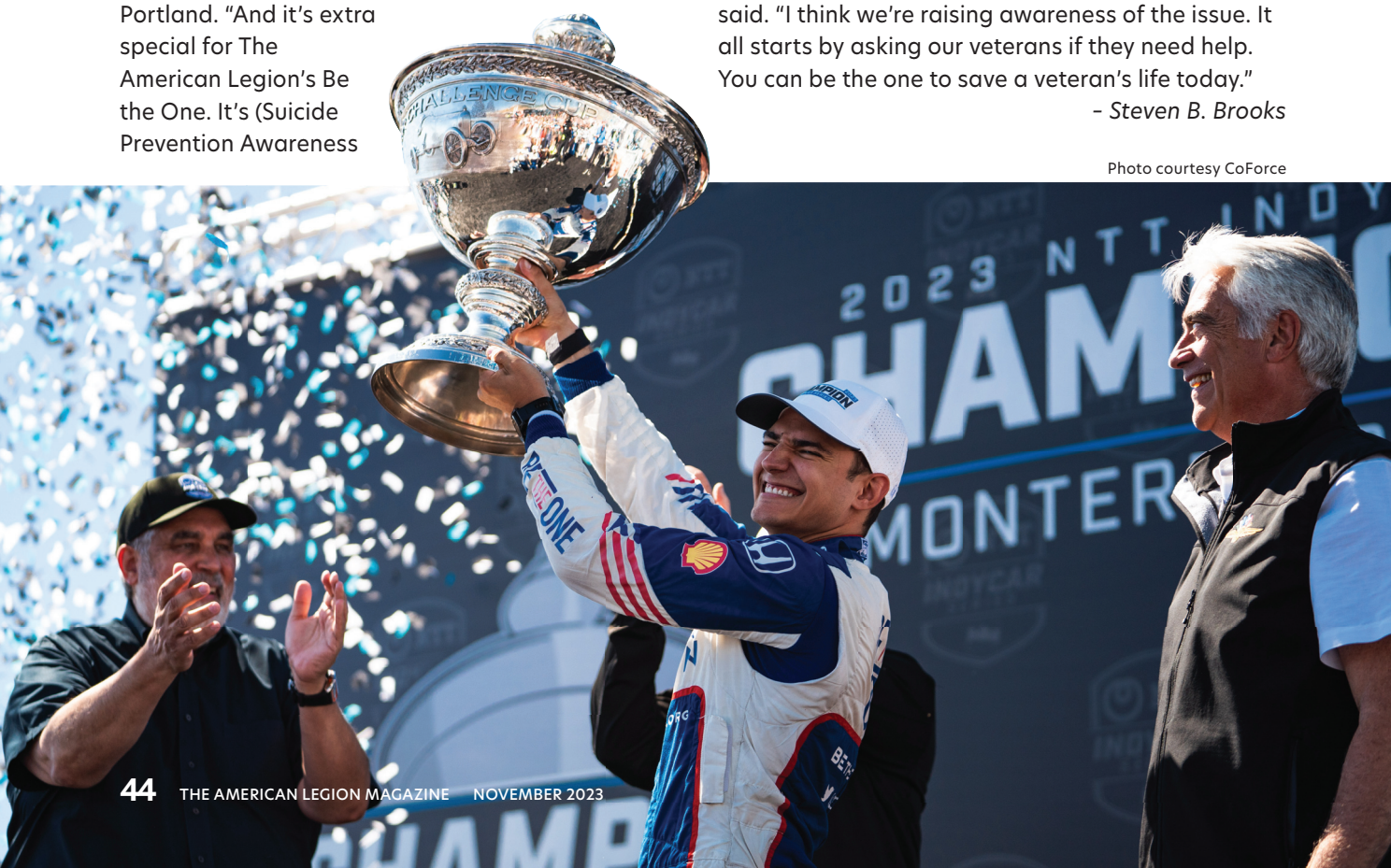
Palou took control of the points race in May. He won the GMR Grand Prix on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway road course, took the pole for the Indy 500 and then finished fourth after being pushed into the wall during a pit stop. Off that performance, he won three straight races and finished the season with a first in Portland and a third in the Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey. He never finished lower than eighth and ended the season with an average finish of 3.71, the best figure in INDYCAR since 2006.

At the 104th National Convention in Charlotte, N.C., team owner Chip Ganassi told the crowd that his partnership with the Legion and promotion of Be the One is unique. "It's not your normal sponsorship where you have a product that we're trying to sell," he said. "It's a program that touches people."

Palou expressed similar feelings speaking with NBC Sports prior to the series finale this season.

"I'm so proud and privileged to be racing for a cause with The American Legion and Be the One," he said. "I think we're raising awareness of the issue. It all starts by asking our veterans if they need help. You can be the one to save a veteran's life today."

– Steven B. Brooks



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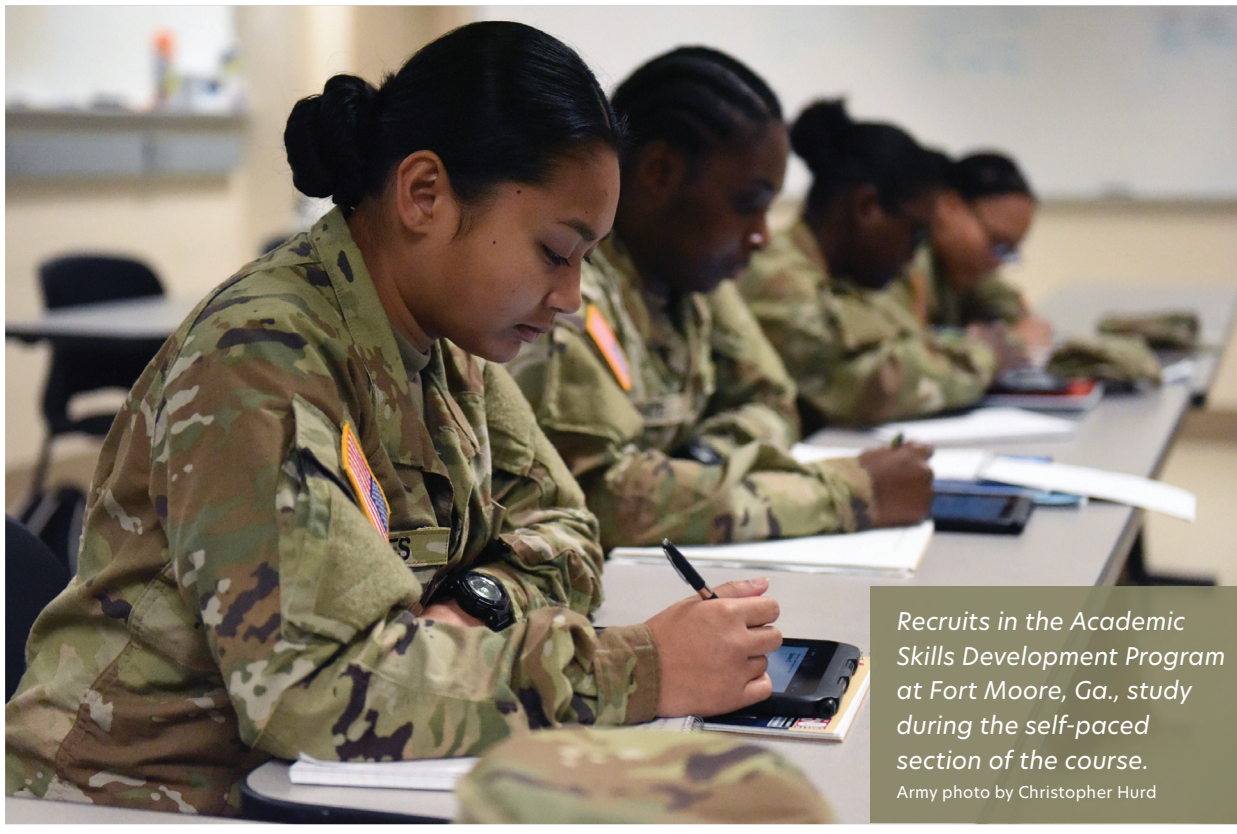

Recruits in the Academic Skills Development Program at Fort Moore, Ga., study during the self-paced section of the course.
Army photo by Christopher Hurd

TESTED

Declining academic performance adds to the military's difficulty filling the ranks.

BY STEVE BEYNON

Editor's note: *This is the second in a series of articles about the U.S. military's recruitment crisis.*

As tensions around the globe escalate, the U.S. military continues to face a shortage of qualified recruits.

The Army, Air Force and Navy expect to miss their recruiting goals this year. In April, Pentagon officials told lawmakers on Capitol Hill that those services expect to come up between 6,000 and 10,000 new recruits short, with the Army having the biggest challenge because it is the largest branch. The Marine Corps and Space Force are relatively small compared to the other services and thus have smaller recruiting goals that are easier to hit.

The U.S. military is in the worst recruiting slump in its history, fighting a competitive labor market and shifting demographic trends and attitudes toward military service. Only about 23% of young people in the prime recruiting age of 17 to 24 are even eligible for service. A Pentagon study found that nearly half of those consider military service a viable career.

Contributing to the problem is poor performance on the military's ACT-style entrance exam. Years of dwindling resources in the nation's public schools have resulted in a batch of high school graduates who cannot pass the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), let alone score high enough to fill high-end jobs in the services, such as air defense and cyber

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security, that will play center stage in future conflicts.

The services are transitioning from the global war on terrorism era to revamping their training and doctrine to large-scale conventional warfare. That includes pouring resources into those technical roles. Even jobs that traditionally have a lower barrier to entry, like infantry, are demanding those troops be competent in working new tech on the battlefield and have solid soft skills to work with others. Noncommissioned officers are increasingly expected to have bachelor's degrees for promotion and formal writing skills to write complex evaluations for soldiers – expectations that once fell to officers.

The academic performance of high school students has dipped in recent years, with ACT scores plunging in 2022 after five years of decline; impacts of the pandemic compounded the drop in scores, according to data from the company that runs the tests.

High school students in the class of 2022 averaged a score of 19.8 out of 36, the lowest in 30 years. The number of test takers who passed the benchmarks for the English section dropped from 60% in 2018 to 53% last year, while students who could pass the math benchmark plummeted from 40% to 31%.

Anxiety is becoming an increasingly prevalent issue among high school students, with many teenagers reporting high stress levels due to the pressures of academic performance, social expectations and other challenges. According to recent data, anxiety disorders are the most common mental health condition among adolescents, affecting some 30% of U.S. teenagers, according to data from the National Institutes of Health.

Those anxiety issues are impacting performance at school. Recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows that math and reading scores have fallen significantly, with some students losing up to a year's worth of academic progress during COVID-19.

Some of those disparities are even greater among Black and Hispanic students, whose ACT scores fell 13 points between 2018 and 2022 compared to white students, whose performance dropped by 5 points. Students reported issues with remote learning during the pandemic, from technical hiccups and distractions at home to difficulty connecting to the teachers and material. Black and Hispanic students generally have less access to quality internet connections and computers at home; white students from upper and middle-class families had less significant disruptions.

Those scores are an imperfect snapshot of the success of a high school's curriculum, and some colleges have stopped weighing them in applications. However, the plummeting scores sync up with a falling performance on the ASVAB, which military applicants take to qualify for service with more complicated jobs requiring higher scores. For example, qualifying for the infantry is a low academic bar versus engineering or cyber roles, which demand top performance on the military's entrance exam. Roughly a decade ago, two-thirds of applicants could pass the ASVAB; now it's about one-third. With the Army, roughly 70% of all applicants drop out of the enlistment process around the time they take a practice ASVAB, service data shows.

The services also have steeper competition from entry-level jobs, many of which offer better pay and benefits such as 401(k) matching and tuition assistance. For example, Buc-ee's, a popular gas station chain in the South, has starting wages between $16 and $20 per hour, while having paths to managerial roles that start at a $100,000 salary.

"It's every job a young person goes up against, because they're offering the same incentives we are right now," Command Sgt. Maj. Marco Irenze, the top enlisted leader of the Nevada Army National Guard's recruiting and retention battalion, told reporters in June.

In 2022, the Army kicked off its Future Soldier Preparatory Course (FSPC), a last chance for applicants to hit the service's standards for enlistment and move on to basic training. That course has two tracks: one for applicants who are slightly overweight and another for those who performed poorly on the ASVAB. Though the Army has put significantly more resources into the academic track, the Navy recently unveiled a similar program called the Future Sailor Preparatory Course.

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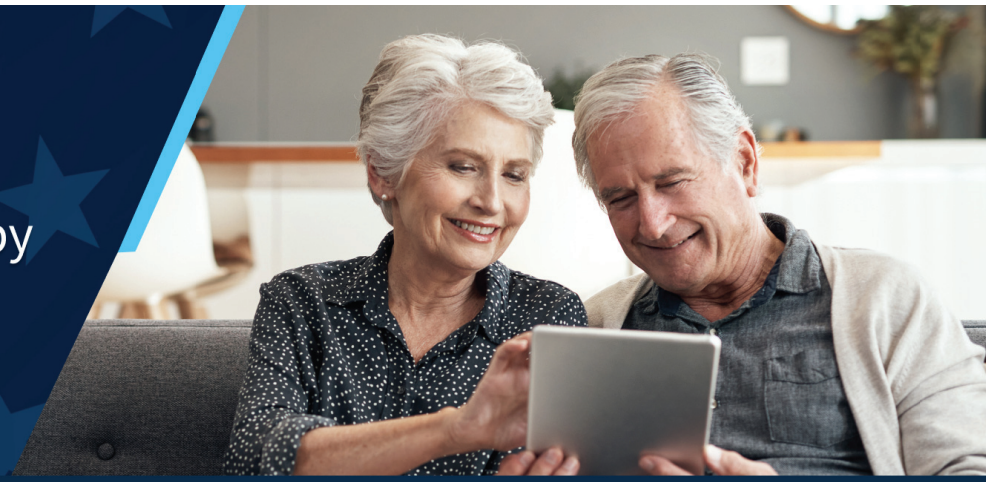

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In both tracks, an applicant has 90 days to either lose the weight or score high enough on the ASVAB. The Army, by far the Pentagon's largest branch, also recently expanded the academic part of the course, signaling that test-taking skills are one of the biggest pitfalls when it comes to filling the ranks.

The prep courses are at Fort Moore (formerly Fort Benning), Ga., and Fort Jackson, S.C. There, applicants on the academic track receive critical tutoring and learn test-taking skills. In some cases, applicants attending that course speak English as a second language and had difficulty with some of the complex questions their first time taking the test, which involves puzzle-solving and reading comprehension. Roughly 8,000 non-citizens join the U.S. military every year.

With both tracks, the Army can graduate about 12,000 a year into basic training who otherwise would not be eligible to enlist. That almost makes up for the 15,000 soldiers the Army came up short on last year's recruiting goal of 60,000. This year, the Army has an even more ambitious goal of recruiting 65,000 active-duty soldiers. So far, more than 90% of applicants have graduated the FSPC fitness or academic track and moved on to basic training.

Meanwhile, the armed forces are having to deal with what many consider outdated views on cannabis use. An applicant's history with marijuana doesn't outright boot them from qualifying to serve, but recruiters will often need to get a waiver for the applicants to sign up, which can take months.

Some branches are expanding their tolerance for recruits who have used marijuana in the past. More than half of all new recruits come from states where marijuana is now legal, whether for recreational or medical use. Though marijuana and other THC-based therapeutics may be legal in much of the United States, a federal ban is still in place.

Last year, the Air Force and Space Force put out a new policy for applicants who fail a drug test during their medical processing, granting them an opportunity to return and try again in 90 days. Under the previous policy, testing positive for THC at the Military Entrance Processing Station, or MEPS, barred a candidate from enlisting. MEPS is the last stop before applicants formally enlist into service.

Marijuana use has been steadily increasing among young people, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, which found that among individuals 12 to 25, over 43% reported using marijuana at least once in their lifetime, and nearly 22% reported using it in the past year.

Though there is scant evidence marijuana use is a major factor in the military recruiting crisis, applicants testing positive or having criminal records tied to possession or distribution can cause serious headaches for recruiters trying to get them into the ranks.

Some service leaders, including Army Secretary Christine Wormuth, have also pointed toward a slew of negative press about the military as hurting recruiting. The gruesome slaying of Army Spc. Vanessa Guillén at Fort Cavazos (formerly Fort Hood), Texas, shook the Army to its core and put a spotlight on soldier quality-of-life issues, the branch's treatment of women and the quality of its commanders. At least a dozen leaders at the base were fired.

Other headlines show the service branches continue to grapple with suicide, sexual assault and harassment, and inadequate and substandard housing, among other issues.

That unfavorable perception of military service has not necessarily made its way to young Americans, who are generally less in tune with the news, but instead has had an effect on their local influencers, including parents, coaches, teachers and church leaders.

However, the Pentagon is optimistic moving ahead on recruiting. Its numbers are already higher than last year, including in the Army National Guard, which is expected to hit its goal of 35,000 new recruits soon.

"We are doing better now than we did last year," Wormuth told reporters in June. "I hope we'll continue to see good news coming out in the next few months. I think our recruiting productivity is increasing."

Steve Beynon is a reporter for Military.com based in Washington, D.C. An Afghanistan war veteran, he served over a decade as a cavalry scout and is currently a noncommissioned officer in the Army National Guard.

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LORE OF THE LEGION

STORY: JEFF STOFFER EDITOR: AUGUST UHL
ART: CHAD TRUJILLO COLOR: MARCUS ESKOW

JAN. 31, 1946. E. ROY STONE OF GREENVILLE, S.C., IS DISCHARGED FROM THE NAVY. HE SERVED IN BOTH THEATERS OF WORLD WAR II, EARNING THE SILVER STAR.

HE VISITS HIS STATE'S ONLY VETERANS HOSPITAL "... AND SAW MEN BEING PUT IN THE HALLWAYS – A WAITING LIST OF OVER 800 GIs. I WENT TO THE FUNERALS OF THE MEN WHO WERE STORED IN THE HALLWAYS BECAUSE THE VA DIDN'T HAVE SPACE FOR THEM."

HE JOINS THE AMERICAN LEGION AND DEDICATES HIS LIFE TO VETERANS, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY.

NAMED PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER BY THE 69TH AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL CONVENTION IN 1987, HE IS KNOWN AS "MR. VETERAN" BY CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, REP. G.V. "SONNY" MONTGOMERY, D-MISS.

IN 1994, MONTGOMERY ENTERS INTO THE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD STONE'S 1994 ESSAY "THIS WE BELIEVE," WHICH SHARES VALUES THAT GUIDE THE LEGION TODAY.

"WE BELIEVE...

A VETERAN IS A VETERAN...

... NO VETERAN IS MORE OR LESS DESERVING OF THAT WHICH HAS BEEN EARNED WITH BLOOD.

PROMISES MADE TO VETERANS MUST BE PROMISES KEPT...

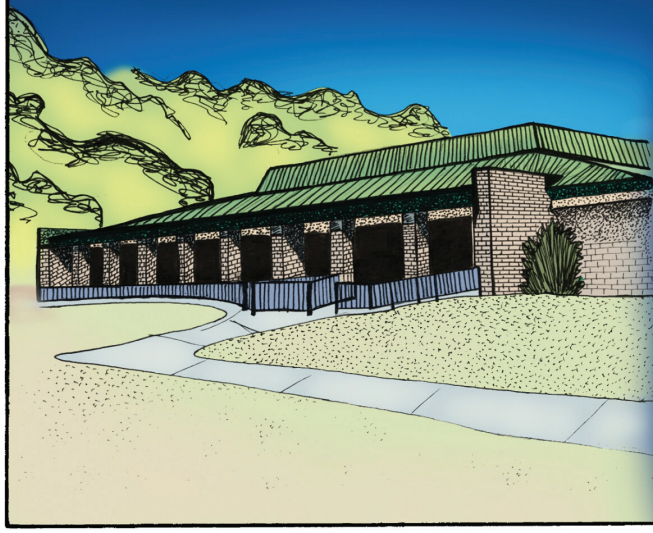
... IF YOU SERVE YOUR COUNTRY, YOU WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN.

PATRIOTISM AND AMERICANISM OVER ALL OTHER 'ISMS'...

... WE BELIEVE IN A STRONG AMERICA, AN AMERICA THAT HAS THE ECONOMIC AND MILITARY MIGHT TO KEEP DEMOCRACY ALIVE HERE AT HOME AND OVERSEAS.

FAITH WITH OUR FALLEN COMRADES....

... WE MUST REDEDICATE OURSELVES TO THE IDEALS OF OUR ORGANIZATION, BE ACTIVE, AND KEEP FAITH WITH OUR FALLEN COMRADES."



THE E. ROY STONE VETERANS PAVILION IN COLUMBUS – A 90-BED STATE NURSING HOME – IS NAMED IN HIS HONOR, AS IS A GREENVILLE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION BUILDING AND AN OFFICE IN AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS.

STONE PASSED AWAY APRIL 29, 2001, AT 88, BUT HIS TIMELESS MESSAGE CONTINUES TO PLAY ON THE NATIONAL WEBSITE AND IN SOCIAL MEDIA.

#63

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China trying to recruit U.S. military talent

Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., confirmed by the Senate on Sept. 20 to lead the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has warned Air Force personnel that foreign companies linked to the People's Republic of China (PRC) are "targeting and recruiting U.S.- and NATO-trained military talent across specialties and career fields."

As *The Washington Post* reports, "Attempts by China's military to exploit Americans have included marketing job openings to them that initially appear innocuous, and approaching them directly at defense industry events."

Brown's directive cautions airmen that "by essentially training the trainer, many of those who accept contracts with these foreign companies are eroding our national security, putting the very safety of their fellow servicemembers and the country at risk," and challenges those who recently separated from the Air Force to protect "our national defense information."

The *Post* adds that Brown's concerns are echoed by Rep. Michael Gallagher, R-Wis., who chairs the Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party.

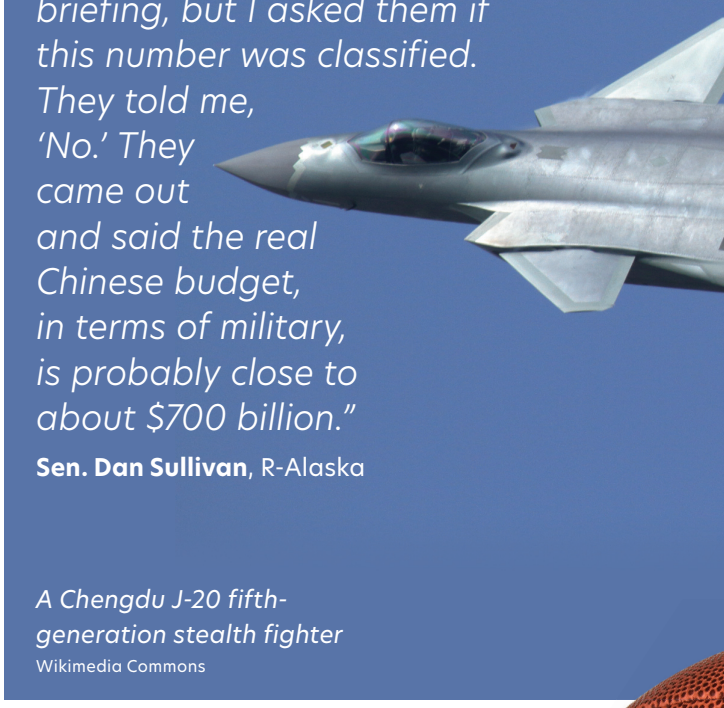
"Congress needs to work with the Department of Defense to educate our servicemembers and ensure they do not help facilitate their own destruction," Gallagher said.

Taliban exacts its revenge

More than 200 former Afghan government officials and security forces have been executed in extrajudicial killings since the Taliban swept back into power in August 2021, Military.com reports, citing the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). UNAMA also "documented at least 800 human rights violations against former Afghan government officials and security forces" since August 2021, according to Military.com. "The groups most targeted by the Taliban have been former army, police and intelligence forces."

"We had a brief from some of our top intelligence agency officials .... It was a classified briefing, but I asked them if this number was classified. They told me, 'No.' They came out and said the real Chinese budget, in terms of military, is probably close to about $700 billion."

Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska



A Chengdu J-20 fifth-generation stealth fighter
Wikimedia Commons

Private firms help with military sealift

Three U.S. firms have promised nine ships to a new Transportation Department initiative aimed at providing the military with sealift capacity, Breaking Defense reports. The Tanker Security Program "will help strengthen both our supply chains and our national security by delivering fuel to our armed forces around the world while creating hundreds of good jobs for American mariners," according to Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg.

The three companies contributing vessels to the program are Overseas Shipholding Group, based in Tampa, Fla.; Seabulk Tankers, based in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; and a joint venture involving Crowley, based in Jacksonville, Fla., and the American division of Stena Bulk.

In exchange for access to the tankers, the companies will receive $6 million per year per ship. Four vessels have already begun operating under the program.

Envato

NFL, USO host contest for Super Bowl tickets

The NFL and the USO have launched the Salute to Service Showdown, an EA Sports "Madden NFL 24" video game tournament open to active-duty, reserve and National Guard personnel. As **Military.com** reports, the grand prize for the two tournament winners is a trip to Super Bowl LVIII in Las Vegas in February.

ON POINT

THE AMERICAN LEGION IN WASHINGTON

H.R. 1278 – DRIVER REIMBURSEMENT INCREASE FOR VETERAN EQUITY (DRIVE) ACT

"The lack of a consistent and reliable mechanism to periodically adjust the per-mile authorization for beneficiary travel creates an injustice and an unfair economic burden that will only grow in time."

Written American Legion testimony submitted June 21 to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health, in support of the DRIVE Act, which would authorize VA to increase mileage reimbursements for veterans traveling to health-care facilities

In the nearly 15 years since a change was made to bring VA mileage reimbursement rates up to those recommended by the General Services Administration (GSA), the rate has not changed for qualified veterans traveling to and from VA health-care appointments. VA mileage reimbursements have historically been lower than GSA rates or prevailing industry rates for personal mileage.

A resolution passed at the 2016 American Legion national convention calls for improved veteran transportation services and urges the VA secretary to "periodically adjust the rate to ensure that the per-mile reimbursement rate is increased at a reasonable and acceptable level."

The Legion's testimony in June reiterated its position of support of H.R. 1278 to bring personal mileage reimbursement rates into line with those recommended by the GSA.

Who qualifies?

- Veterans with VA service-connected disability ratings of 30% or greater
- Veterans receiving VA pensions
- Veterans whose incomes fall below the maximum rate for VA pensions on a per-mile basis

41.5 cents Rate per mile now reimbursable to qualified veterans traveling to and from VA health-care facilities for appointments

65.5 cents Rate per mile set by the GSA in January for authorized use of a privately owned vehicle

Envato

Estate planning and online accounts

At any given time, the average American maintains between 30 and 50 online accounts with financial institutions, email providers, social media outlets and a variety of other sites. Modern estate plans should include an "ePlan" to manage online accounts and data. There are four steps to creating an effective ePlan:

Compile a list of accounts and how to access them. Specify the username, password, account number and a description of what is included in each account. Because passwords frequently change, keep this list up to date. Social media accounts may be valuable or sentimental because they contain photos and comments that should be passed on to family; a good ePlan will instruct the executor on what to do with these assets.

Store and protect your information. This will involve saving the list you compiled, as well as backing up important data files and account information. Because an ePlan account list contains sensitive information such as usernames and passwords, it is essential to maintain the security and confidentiality of this list.

Select your digital executor. Many states have passed laws that give access to online accounts to the executor of an estate. In some cases, however, state law may limit access if the executor does not have the password or an estate plan does not clearly grant powers to the executor to access these accounts.

Provide your executor with "digital directions." A letter of instruction can tell the executor how to manage your online accounts and digital assets, and provide recommendations for the distribution of various accounts, assets, files and information to family.

For questions about estate planning, contact the Legion's Office of Charitable Giving at **(317) 630-1225**, **plannedgiving@legion.org** or **legion.giftlegacy.com**.

Wasted space

20% Amount of federal agencies' headquarters that are occupied

511 million
Total amount of square feet of office space owned/leased by the federal government

$7 billion
Approximate amount taxpayers spend per year to lease, operate and maintain federal office space

Sources: GAO, *The Wall Street Journal*

MY GI BILL VETERANS & EDUCATION
BY VALERIE VIGIL

Chapter 33 and scholarships

Q: *I'm attending Central Maine Community College utilizing my Chapter 33 Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. I'll graduate in December and transfer to a university. When I do, I want to stop working and concentrate on my classes so I can graduate sooner. Is it possible to receive scholarships since VA is paying my tuition and fees?*

A: You may apply for scholarships or grants along with receiving the Post-9/11 GI Bill. After you receive one, the school will review the criteria when awarding it to your account. If the scholarship states tuition-only, the award(s) will be applied first to your tuition. Any remaining tuition due will be billed to VA. If the scholarship states it must be applied toward tuition, fees and all other expenses, the school will bill VA first and may then be able to release the funds to your account.

Title IV grants are an exception to the rule. Contact the university's financial aid office for more information relevant to your situation.

Valerie Vigil is a Marine Corps veteran and member of American Legion Post 27 in Apache Junction, Ariz. ***askvalerie@legion.org***

BERGMANN & MOORE: CAMP LEJEUNE JUSTICE ACT

What CLJA claimants need to know about the 'Elective Option'

In October 2022, Bergmann & Moore entered into a memorandum of understanding with The American Legion to provide education and representation under the Camp Lejeune Justice Act (CLJA). This month, we'll address the Department of Justice's and Department of the Navy's Sept. 6 news release related to what they are calling the "Elective Option."

First, it is important to know that the proposal is a voluntary framework adopted by the Department of the Navy and the Department of Justice to evaluate and potentially settle claims brought under CLJA. Although plaintiff's counsel was not consulted about the Elective Option, at the very least we are pleased that the government is finally beginning the process of resolving Camp Lejeune contaminated-water claims.

Unfortunately, the proposed "option" applies to a small subset of these claims. Bergmann & Moore, to include through our co-counsel, is currently pursuing upwards of 50 diagnoses related to toxic water exposure.

The government's Elective Option only applies to the following nine diagnoses, which must include evidence of your diagnosis and exposure:

(1) Bladder cancer
(2) Liver cancer
(3) Kidney cancer
(4) Leukemia
(5) Multiple myeloma
(6) Parkinson's disease
(7) Scleroderma
(8) Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
(9) Kidney disease/end-stage renal disease

Even if you have one of the nine diagnoses, there are many limitations to the Elective Option.

• First, you must have been diagnosed or treated within 35 years of your last date of exposure at Camp Lejeune. For example, if you were last exposed in February 1970, you must have been diagnosed no later than February 2005. Note that if your diagnosis was more than 35 years after your last date of exposure, you will not qualify for compensation under the Elective Option.

• Second, if you have more than one diagnosis, you can only receive compensation for one diagnosis under the Elective Option.

For claimants who qualify under the Elective Option and have submitted administrative claim forms, the government will make offers ranging from $100,000 (for those exposed at Camp Lejeune for less than one year) to $450,000 (for those exposed for five-plus years) during the 1953-1987 timeframe. Additional compensation is available in cases where the exposed person died of their diagnosis. The timeframe of these offers is currently unknown.

Our recommendation: In consultation with our co-counsel, we believe these offers fall short of adequately valuing the harm caused by the contaminated water and fail to consider many factors that would warrant additional compensation (e.g., multiple injuries, lost wages, age at diagnosis, etc.). If you have one of the diagnoses listed and want to discuss your options, call our co-counsel Beasley Allen and talk to an attorney at **(866) 844-4521** or **TT-CampLejeune@beasleyallen.com**. They can walk you through the process. Should you contact Beasley Allen, be sure to note that you are calling after learning about this in *The American Legion Magazine*.

For claimants who do not qualify for the Elective Option, the fight continues. There is nothing you need to do at this time, and your claims may still settle in the future. We continue to litigate these claims and represent your best interests.

If you are interested in filing a CLJA claim, call **(800) 898-9450** or fill out the form at **camplejeunelitigationteam.com/al**.

If you have questions before filing a claim, or would like a representative to speak to your department or detachment, contact Liz Hartman, Bergmann & Moore's CLJA liaison to The American Legion, at **(252) 497-7255**. The Legion encourages veterans and claimants to reach out to an accredited CLJA attorney for any condition they believe may be related to toxic water exposure while at Camp Lejeune.

Wellcare partners with Legion on Medicare Advantage plans

A common request received by The American Legion's veteran service officers relates to finding assistance in navigating Medicare and Medicare Advantage benefits, and how Medicare interacts with other post-military health-care coverage.

"Medicare can be used alongside other benefits, and VA encourages those who receive health care through its network to also sign up for Medicare or Medicare Advantage when they are first eligible," American Legion Chief Marketing Officer Dean Kessel explains.

It's important to note that there is a difference between Medicare and Medicare Advantage. Original Medicare allows beneficiaries to receive care from non-VA hospitals or doctors, allowing veterans more options from which to choose. A Medicare Advantage plan will have a select network to choose from and may also cover additional services not covered in your VA benefits, such as dental. "Our newest partner, Wellcare, is poised to serve as a salient resource in this area for Legionnaires," Kessel says.

Medicare Advantage and Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits You can have both Medicare Advantage and VA benefits. By having both types of coverage, your network of possible care providers is broader, and you have the flexibility to seek care outside the VA system. Some veterans choose to enroll in Medicare Part A because it's premium-free but turn down Part B because of the additional monthly premium. However, you may also want to consider a Part C Medicare Advantage plan from Wellcare. Signing up for a Medicare Advantage plan along with your VA benefits will give you more support, more access and more benefits.

Medicare and TRICARE for Life You can have both Medicare and TRICARE for Life benefits. If you are TRICARE-eligible and have Medicare Parts A and B – no matter how old you are or where you live – TRICARE for Life pays for any costs that Medicare doesn't fully cover, so you'll have no out-of-pocket costs for services that both Medicare and TRICARE cover. There is no enrollment fee; all you need is your military ID as proof of coverage.

Medicare and CHAMPVA Like TRICARE for Life, CHAMPVA (Civilian Health and Medical Program of Veterans Affairs) is a completely separate program for spouses of veterans who are disabled or who have died and who aren't eligible for TRICARE. Applications for CHAMPVA are at **va.gov**.

For more information on specific Wellcare products, Legionnaires are invited to call **(844) 599-0128** (TTY:711).

DISCLAIMER: *'Ohana Health Plan, a plan offered by WellCare Health Insurance of Arizona, Inc. Washington residents: Health Net Life Insurance Company is contracted with Medicare for PPO plans. "Wellcare by Health Net" is issued by Health Net Life Insurance Company. Washington residents: "Wellcare" is issued by Wellcare of Washington, Inc. Washington residents: "Wellcare" is issued by Wellcare Health Insurance Company of Washington, Inc. New Mexico (NM) Dual Eligible Special Needs Plan (DSNP) Members: As a Wellcare by Allwell D-SNP member, you have coverage from both Medicare and Medicaid. Medicaid services are funded in part by the state of New Mexico. NM Medicaid benefits may be limited to payment of Medicare premiums for some members. Louisiana D-SNP prospective enrollees: For detailed information about Louisiana Medicaid benefits, please visit the Medicaid website at* ***https://ldh.la.gov/medicaid*** *or* ***https://www.louisianahealthconnect.com****. To request a written copy of our Medicaid Provider Directory, please contact us.*

Notice: TennCare is not responsible for payment for these benefits, except for appropriate cost sharing amounts. TennCare is not responsible for guaranteeing the availability or quality of these benefits. Any benefits above and beyond traditional Medicare benefits are applicable to Wellcare Medicare Advantage only and do not indicate increased Medicaid benefits.

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The So Lite® Scooter is easy to transport and almost impossible to tip over.

*Do not attempt

Like millions of older Americans, I struggle with mobility. For years, I watched my quality of life slip away, as I was forced to stay home while friends and family took part in activities I'd once enjoyed. I thought I'd made some progress when I got a mobility scooter, but then I realized how hard it was to transport. Taking it apart and putting it back together was like doing a jigsaw puzzle. Once I had it disassembled, I had to try to put all of the pieces in the trunk of a car, go to wherever I was going, and repeat the process in reverse. Travel scooters were easier to transport, but they were uncomfortable and scary to drive, I always felt like I was ready to tip over. Then I found the So Lite® Scooter. Now there's nothing that can hold me back.

Years of work by innovative engineers have resulted in a scooter that's designed with seniors in mind. They created Electronic Stability Control (ESC) that makes it virtually impossible to tip over. If you try to turn too quickly, the scooter automatically slows down to prevent it from tipping over. The battery provides powerful energy at a fraction of the weight of most batteries. With its rugged yet lightweight aluminum frame, the So Lite® Scooter is the most portable scooter ever—but it can hold up to 275 pounds—yet weighs only 40.8 pounds without the battery! What's more, it easily folds up for storage in a car seat, trunk or even on an airplane. It folds in seconds without tools and is safe and reliable. Best of all, it's designed with your safety in mind, from the newest technology and superior craftsmanship. Why spend another day letting your lack of mobility ruin your quality of life? Call now and find out how you can get a So Lite® Scooter of your very own.

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FOCUS ON FINANCES BY J.J. MONTANARO

How to keep the peace after you're gone

A whopping 86% of respondents to USAA Life Insurance's 2023 Omnibus Survey don't think their family and friends will fight over their property or money. That seems quite optimistic.

What I have seen, personally and professionally, leads me to put the amount of disagreement significantly higher. Granted, most fights won't be of the knock-down-drag-out variety. Instead, you're more likely to see anger, resentment, arguments and hurt feelings. In a couple of words: unnecessary conflict.

Consider what's best for your estate should you die or become incapacitated, and create a comprehensive plan. Then you can rest easy knowing that if something bad happens, things can go smoothly and with minimal conflict. Here are five moves to think about as you work to create peace and tranquility:

Review your beneficiary designations. I have worked with people who had their ex-spouses listed as a beneficiary on IRAs, life insurance or the like. That's fine if it's your intent, but in most cases it probably isn't. Examine all your financial accounts and employer benefits to ensure the person you listed is who you want to be your beneficiary. Otherwise, there's sure to be confusion and conflict.

Reveal your chain of command. Whether you're naming an agent to make decisions in the event you can't, selecting an executor or successor trustee to manage things when you're gone or choosing who will take care of your kids, let the key players know your intent and give them what they need to succeed. You may need to establish or refresh wills, trusts, powers of attorney, and a letter of instruction detailing your wishes. A qualified estate-planning attorney can help.

Dive deep into details. Some of the most contentious arguments center on low-dollar but high-emotional-value personal property, e.g., a picture or family memento. Head this off by leaving clear guidance. Your friends and family may not agree with your wishes, but if they understand them there should be fewer arguments.

Call a meeting. Not all families are comfortable discussing death, disability and elements along this line. But consider taking the time to share your wishes and plans. Again, putting it out there will go a long way toward keeping the peace.

Give it away while you're alive. Why not clean house and avoid potential disagreements later by giving away some of your things to those you love while you're still around? You can see them enjoy it, and if they don't want what you're giving away and you don't need it, the next stop is charity.

J.J. Montanaro is a certified financial planner with USAA, The American Legion's preferred provider of financial services. ***legion.org/usaa***

AI cracks the code

Cornell University researchers trained an artificial intelligence (AI) system to identify the different sounds each key on a computer keyboard makes. "When the microphone picked up the sound of a keystroke, the AI model could identify the key that was pressed with 95% accuracy," the British news outlet Metro UK reports. "The team took it further by testing the AI's ability to crack a password by listening to a Zoom call." The AI was 93% accurate.

Bankrate surveyed thousands of U.S. adults, asking them what they would need to earn, on average, to feel rich and to feel financially secure. The answers were surprisingly high, CNN reports. Survey respondents said they would need to earn $233,000 a year to feel financially secure and $483,000 a year to feel rich. CNN notes, by way of comparison, that the median earnings for a full-time, year-round worker in 2021 were $56,473. While 72% of respondents said they don't feel financially secure currently, 46% said they expect to achieve financial security someday.

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Popular CoQ10 Pills Leave Millions Suffering

Could this newly-discovered brain fuel solve America's worsening memory crisis?

PALM BEACH, FLORIDA — Millions of Americans take the supplement known as CoQ10. It's the coenzyme that supercharges the "energy factories" in your cells known as *mitochondria*. But there's a serious flaw that's leaving millions unsatisfied.

As you age, your mitochondria break down and fail to produce energy. In a revealing study, a team of researchers showed that 95 percent of the mitochondria in a 90-year-old man were damaged, compared to almost no damage in the mitochondria of a 5-year-old.

Taking CoQ10 alone is not enough to solve this problem. Because as powerful as CoQ10 is, there's one critical thing it fails to do: it can't create new mitochondria to replace the ones you lost.

And that's bad news for Americans all over the country. The loss of cellular energy is a problem for the memory concerns people face as they get older.

"We had no way of replacing lost mitochondria until a recent discovery changed everything," says Dr. Al Sears, founder and medical director of the Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine in Palm Beach, Florida. "Researchers discovered the only nutrient known to modern science that has the power to trigger the growth of new mitochondria."

Why Taking CoQ10 is Not Enough

Dr. Sears explains, "This new discovery is so powerful, it can multiply your mitochondria by 55 percent in just a few weeks. That's the equivalent of restoring decades of lost brain power."

This exciting nutrient — called PQQ *(pyrroloquinoline quinone)* — is the driving force behind a revolution in aging. When paired with CoQ10, this dynamic duo has the power to reverse the age-related memory losses you may have thought were beyond your control.

Dr. Sears pioneered a new formula — called **Ultra Accel II** — that combines both CoQ10 and PQQ to support maximum cellular energy and the normal growth of new mitochondria. **Ultra Accel II** is the first of its kind to address both problems and is already creating huge demand.

Over 47 million doses have been shipped to men and women across the country and sales continue to climb for this much sought-after brain fuel. In fact, demand has been so overwhelming that inventories repeatedly sell out. But a closer look at **Ultra Accel II** reveals there are good reasons why sales are booming.

Science Confirms the Many Benefits of PQQ

The medical journal *Biochemical Pharmacology* reports that PQQ is up to 5,000 times more efficient in sustaining energy production than common antioxidants. With the ability to keep every cell in your body operating at full strength, **Ultra Accel II** delivers more than just added brain power and a faster memory.

People feel more energetic, more alert, and don't need naps in the afternoon. The boost in cellular energy generates more power to your heart, lungs, muscles, and more.

"With the PQQ in Ultra Accel, I have energy I never thought possible at my age," says Colleen R., one of Dr. Sears's patients. "I'm in my 70s but feel 40 again. I think clearly, move with real energy and sleep like a baby."

The response has been overwhelmingly positive, and Dr. Sears receives countless emails from his patients and readers. "My patients tell me they feel better than they have in years. This is ideal for people who are feeling old and run down, or for those who feel more forgetful. It surprises many that you can add healthy and productive years to your life simply by taking **Ultra Accel II** every day."

You may have seen Dr. Sears on television or read one of his 12 best-selling books. Or you may have seen him speak at the 2016 WPBF 25 Health and Wellness Festival in South Florida, featuring Dr. Oz and special guest Suzanne Somers. Thousands of people attended Dr. Sears's lecture on anti-aging breakthroughs and waited in line for hours during his book signing at the event.

Will Ultra Accel II Multiply Your Energy?

Ultra Accel II is turning everything we thought we knew about youthful energy on its head. Especially for people over age 50. In less than 30 seconds every morning, you can harness the power of this breakthrough discovery to restore peak energy and your "spark for life."

So, if you've noticed less energy as you've gotten older, and you want an easy way to reclaim your youthful edge, this new opportunity will feel like blessed relief.

The secret is the "energy multiplying" molecule that activates a dormant gene in your body that declines with age, which then instructs your cells to pump out fresh energy from the inside-out. This growth of new "energy factories" in your cells is called mitochondrial biogenesis.

MEMORY-BUILDING SENSATION: Top doctors are now recommending new Ultra Accel II because it restores decades of lost brain power without a doctor's visit.

Instead of falling victim to that afternoon slump, you enjoy sharp-as-a-tack focus, memory, and concentration from sunup to sundown. And you get more done in a day than most do in a week. Regardless of how exhausting the world is now.

Dr. Sears reports, "The most rewarding aspect of practicing medicine is watching my patients get the joy back in their lives. **Ultra Accel II** sends a wake-up call to every cell in their bodies… And they actually feel young again."

And his patients agree. "I noticed a difference within a few days," says Jerry from Ft. Pierce, Florida. "My endurance has almost doubled, and I feel it mentally, too. There's a clarity and sense of well-being in my life that I've never experienced before."

How To Get Ultra Accel II

This is the official nationwide release of **Ultra Accel II** in the United States. And so, the company is offering a special discount supply to anyone who calls during the official launch.

An Order Hotline has been set up for local readers to call. This gives everyone an equal chance to try **Ultra Accel II**. And your order is backed up by a no-hassle, 90-day money back guarantee. No questions asked.

Starting at 7:00 AM today, the discount offer will be available for a limited time only. All you have to do is call TOLL FREE **1-800-604-7795** right now and use promo code **AMLUA1023** to secure your own supply.

Important: Due to **Ultra Accel II** recent media exposure, phone lines are often busy. If you call and do not immediately get through, please be patient and call back.

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How to submit a reunion

The American Legion Magazine publishes reunion notices for veterans. Send notices to ***The American Legion Magazine,* Attn: Reunions, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206,** e-mail **reunions@legion.org** or submit information online at **legion.org/reunions**.

Include the branch of service and complete name of the group, no abbreviations, with your request. The listing also should include the reunion dates and city, along with a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Listings are free.

Notices will remain online until the final day of the reunion. Upon submission, allow three months for your reunion to be published in print. **Due to the large number of reunions, *The American Legion Magazine* will publish a group's listing twice a year.**

Other notices

"In Search Of" is a means of getting in touch with people from your unit to plan a reunion. **We do not publish listings that seek people for interviews, research purposes, military photos or help in filing a VA claim.** Listings must include the name of the unit from which you seek people, the time period and the location, as well as a contact name, phone number and e-mail address. Send notices to ***The American Legion Magazine,* Attn: "In Search Of," P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206** or e-mail **reunions@legion.org**.

The magazine will not publish names of individuals, only the name of the unit. Listings are free.

Life Membership notices are published for Legionnaires who have been awarded life memberships by their posts. **This does not include a member's own Paid-Up-For-Life membership.**

Notices must be submitted on official forms, which may be obtained by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to ***The American Legion Magazine*, Attn: Life Memberships, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206**.

"Comrades in Distress" listings must be approved by the Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division. If you are seeking to verify an injury received during service, contact your American Legion department service officer for information on how to publish a notice.

To respond to a "Comrades in Distress" listing, send a letter to ***The American Legion Magazine*, Attn: Comrades in Distress, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206**. Include the listing's CID number in your response.

"Taps" notices are published only for Legionnaires who served as department commanders or national officers.

NAVY

***Keppler* DD 765,** Port Canaveral/Cocoa Beach, FL (Cruise), 4/18-28, Stephen Mooney, (732) 284-0134, kepplerdd765@gmail.com; **Naval Support Activity Da Nang, Vietnam,** Knoxville, TN, 4/8-14, Bernie Uhrinek, (724) 353-9627; ***The Sullivans* DD 537/DDG 68,** Jacksonville, FL, 6/19-23, Michael Sutorus, (813) 943-1947, reunions@ussthesullivans.net

IN SEARCH OF

510th Eng Maint (DS) (Cam Ranh Bay & Pleiku, Vietnam, 1966-1967), Tom Berends, (715) 781-5614, tmberends@yahoo.com

608th Ord Co (Fort Benning, GA, 1977-1982), Charles Dvorak, (402) 292-0526

A Co 94th Eng Bn (ELK Kaserne, Darmstadt, Germany, 1988-1990), Charles Dvorak, (402) 292-0526

B Co 125th Sig Bn (Vietnam, May 1968), Laurence Rohr, (618) 294-4658, lcjrohr@gmail.com

Coast Guard Yard Barracks Curtis Bay, MD (1988-1991), Bruce Matthews, (315) 489-3824, brucematthews429@gmail.com

HQ Co 1/503rd 173rd Abn Bde (Kubasaki Med Plt, Okinawa, Japan, 1963-1965), James Hintzke, (920) 982-3294, jlea1944@att.net

Mar Det *Missouri* BB 63 (1987-1988), Rich Parenteau, (206) 739-4340, linkm2010@hotmail.com

Naval Comm Stn Guam, Blue Devils Football Team (1972), Jim "The Rabbit" Wargo, (732) 382-6138

***Pulaski County* LST 1088 (Vietnam),** Robert Branyan, robertbranyan1943@gmail.com

US Coast Guard Grp Baltimore (1988-1991), Bruce Matthews, (315) 489-3824, brucematthews429@gmail.com

LIFE MEMBERSHIP

Post 56, AZ: Harrison Humes, Gregory Luna Jr., Alfonse Olivarez, Clayton Williams, Thomas Woodward

Post 283, FL: David L. Mueller

TAPS

Michael H. McDermott, Dept. of New York. Dept. Cmdr. 2019-2021 and Nat'l Sec. Cncl. Memb. 2012-2023.

Ulyses O. Thomas Jr., Dept. of North Carolina. Nat'l Sec. Cncl. Memb. 2022-2023.

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Reduces the risk of infections?	**YES** More than 5 million Men's Liberty units have been sold, with reduced risk of infections or skin injuries	**NO** High incidence of diaper rash, sores, yeast infections and dermatitis
Invisible under clothing?	**YES** Men's Liberty is unnoticeable — only you know it's there	**NO** Awkward diapers can be ill-fitting, bulky and uncomfortable
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[1]Vaughan CP, Johnson TM 2nd, Goode PS, Redden DT, Burgio KL, Markland AD. Military exposure and urinary incontinence among American men. J Urol. 2014 Jan; 191(1):125-9. doi: 10.1016/j.juro.2013.07.016. Epub 2013 Jul 16. PMID: 23871759.

LT 70067 A

Black Friday is immediately followed by Broke Saturday.

THANKSGIVING is the day some men start getting in shape … to play Santa Claus.

DID YOU HEAR the one about the painter who was hired to whitewash a church? Unfortunately, he thinned the paint too much, causing it to wash away entirely during the first rain.

The minister called the painter to complain.

"What do you want me to do about it?" the painter asked.

"Repaint," said the minister firmly, "and thin no more."

WHAT DO YOU CALL a line of men waiting to get haircuts? A barberqueue.

THREE YEARS AGO, my doctor told me I was going deaf. I have't heard from him since.

A TEACHER, seeing one of her students making faces at others on the playground, stopped to gently reprimand the boy.

Smiling, she said, "When I was a girl, I was told that if I kept making ugly faces, it would freeze like that."

The child looked up and replied, "Well, ma'am, you can't say you weren't warned."

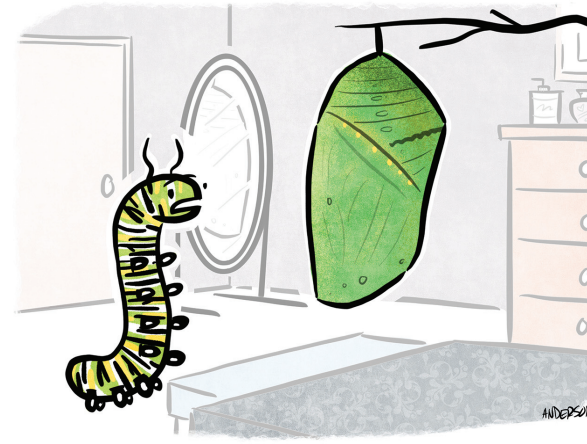
I'M THINKING I should do lunges to stay in shape. That would be a big step forward.

PEOPLE ALWAYS SAY that hard work never killed anybody. But really, have you ever heard of anybody resting themselves to death?

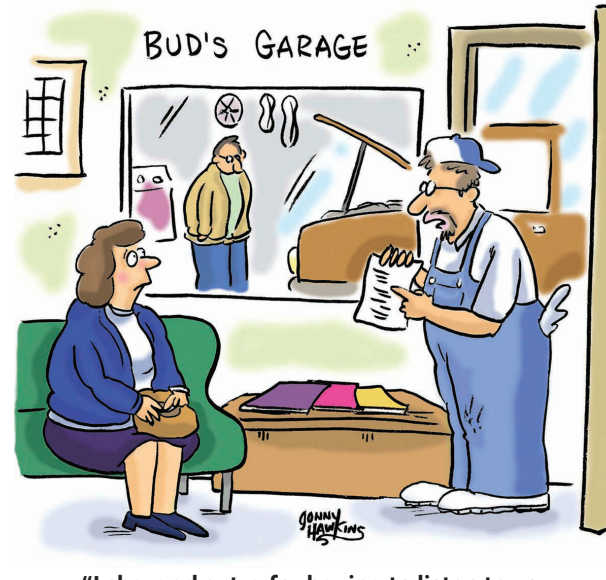
I WANTED to be a biologist, but all the coursework on hearts and lungs and kidneys made it seem like one long organ recital.

MY WIFE says I'm gaining weight. In my defense, I've had a lot on my plate recently.

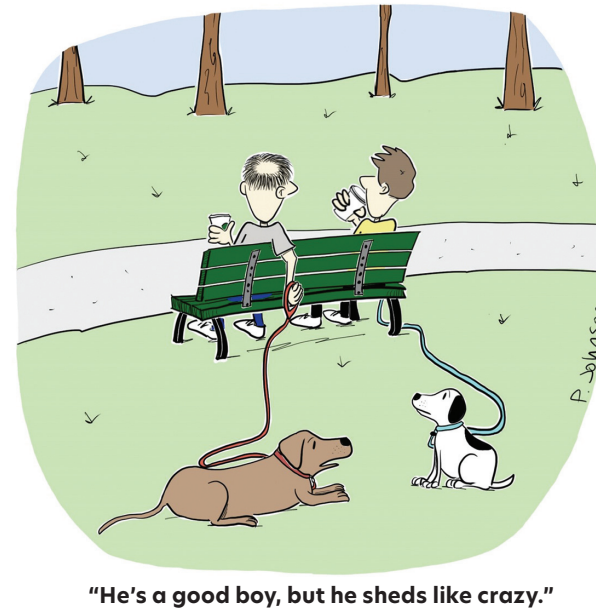
"HOW MANY philosophers does it take to change a lightbulb? None. They're not really into that sort of thing. If it's that dark, light a candle." – *Phil Cornwell*



"Could you hurry it up, sweetheart? We're going to be late!"



"I charged extra for having to listen to your husband's advice while doing the repairs."



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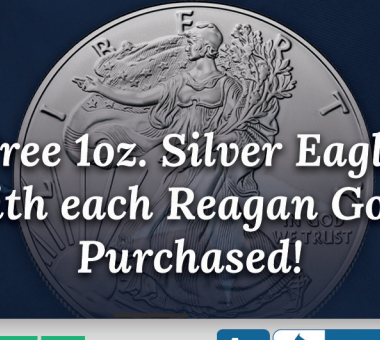

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